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“I AM NOT GOING TO HIDE WHO I AM”:

HOW JEWISH GIRL ACTIVISTS NAVIGATE THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO VOICE, VISIBILITY, AND REPRESENTATION

A DISSERTATION
BY
CHERYL ANN WEINER

Submitted to the

Ph.D. Educational Studies Department in the

Graduate School of Education at

LESLEY UNIVERSITY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

"I am Not Going to Hide Who I am."
How Jewish Girl Activists Navigate their Relationship to Voice, Visibility, and Representation

A Dissertation Presented

By

Cheryl Ann Weiner

Ph.D. in Educational Studies Program
Individually Designed Specialization
Graduate School of Education
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In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

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DEDICATION

This is a dissertation that focuses on visibility and feeling seen. While I have held a longtime interest in learning about the lives of Jewish girls, this dissertation would not have been possible without the loving support of my husband, Jared Matas. I am a lucky person to have a partner in Jared, and I want to thank him for supporting and encouraging me throughout this journey. He is a loving and thoughtful partner who cared for me and our family while I pursued my academic studies. As part of my own identity wrestling, I always knew that I wanted to return to school. After several years of working with Jewish adolescent girls, spending time in Israel, and starting our own family, *what* I wanted to study became clearer. With two young children and a busy household to support, Jared encouraged me to return to school because he knew that it was important to me and he believed in what I believed. It was no small sacrifice. I am grateful to Jared for holding down the fort, loving me, editing my papers, and promoting my scholarship amongst his peers. I'm excited to see what's next for us as a family.

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me to examine girls' development through a psychosocial lens. This was an important framework for accounting for girls' diverse experiences.

Amy, where to begin? I can't believe that this aspect of our relationship is ending. It feels surreal. You have been an excellent friend, mentor, teacher, and guide to me. Prior to coming to Lesley, I didn't know what girls' studies was. With your gentle and firm manner, you have encouraged me to challenge myself and to grow in ways that weren't always comfortable. At some points, I didn't think they were possible, but I know that it was because you believed in me. I know that isn't something to take for granted. I cherish you, and I am grateful to you for all that you have helped me learn. I came into Lesley with so many assumptions about myself and about the scholarship I wanted to produce. Looking back on that time, it's hard to believe I'm the same person. Thank you for helping me grow. You hold a very special place in my heart.

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Abstract

This dissertation examined how 32 Jewish activist girls, aged 14 to 18, who were affiliated with Jewish communities navigated their relationship with voice, visibility, and representation. A primary goal of the study was to understand the challenges they faced in their everyday lives and to make their knowledge known. Research questions that guided the study included: 1) How do Jewish activist girls navigate their relationship to voice, visibility, and representation?; 2) What are the unique challenges experienced by Jewish girl activists?; and 3) How do Jewish girl activists exercise resistance against the challenges they experience? The literature that informed this study were drawn from research on girls' development, the field of girls' and girlhood studies, and sociological and cultural studies on the lived experiences of Jewish girls. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and a survey with a purposively selected group of Jewish girls from across a diverse range of racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, religious, and geographic backgrounds. Data were coded and thematically analyzed using grounded theory analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Findings showed that girls wrestled with multiple aspects of their identities, including: 1) Issues around faith and spirituality and structural issues in traditional Judaism; 2) Antisemitism and criticism about Israel and their own relationship with Israel; 3) Making their Jewish identities known; 4) Complex understandings about their racial, ethnic, and gender identities; and 5) The need for validation and approval. Generating theory about Jewish activist girls revealed that Jewish identification had a significant influence on the way that they related to voice, action, and representation.

Keywords: Jewish girls, Jewish teen activism, girl activists, Jewish girlhood studies, girls' identity

Chapter 1: Introduction

This study examines how Jewish activist girls ages 14 to 18 who are engaged with and affiliated with Jewish communities navigate their relationship with voice, visibility, and representation as they develop their identities. The project aims to create a more nuanced definition of Jewish girlhood by amplifying the voices and experiences of a racially, ethnically, socioeconomically, geographically, and religiously diverse population of Jewish adolescent girls and to bring visibility to their lives.[1] This research is important to me for personal reasons. As a White, cisgender, middle-class Jewish woman, I am constantly engaged in my own personal struggle to negotiate my relationship to Judaism, Israel, feminism, class, and Whiteness. I feel that I have rarely taken the space— or been given the space— to explore the complexity of these identities, whether in classrooms and conferences that focus on addressing difference, because Jewishness and/or Antisemitism are invisible, or in conversations with non-Jewish friends who do not see Judaism as an important identity worth discussing. Moreover, I know that some of my Jewish friends and I hold different opinions about Israel than I do, and it can become difficult and emotionally tiresome to enter into these conversations. Instead, I have hidden behind dominant truths that people believe to be my experience, whether it relates to my class position, my opinions about Israel, or whether my Jewishness matters. I have simmered in silence and lacked the words and the courage to know *what* to do with my questions and my feelings.

I did not see a connection between my experiences and those of contemporary Jewish adolescent girls, nor did I think that they were relevant to feminist and/or activist discourse.

---

[1] This research project focused on Jewish girlhood and girl-identifying participants. A few participants in the study identified as gender queer. When I refer to the study topic and the entire population of participants, I use the term “girl” or “girls.” When I refer to them specifically, I use their preferred pronouns of “she” or “they.”

During my undergraduate studies, I read several texts authored by Jewish women. At the time, I failed to notice that their lives were rarely the subject of study, despite the fact that my women's studies program emphasized a multicultural approach. Twenty years later, when I returned to school to study Jewish girls' socioemotional development, I couldn't help but notice their absence from the identity-rich literature I was exposed to. As I began to wrestle with my own complicated thoughts and feelings—and those of Jewish girls with whom I worked— I realized that the lack of discourse did not mean that their experiences did not matter.

I see this work— which centers the meaning-making experiences of Jewish activist girls— as an important contribution to understanding how Jewish girls navigate their identities through various contexts and spaces. The timing is critical given the socio-political climate in which Jewish girls are situated, where Antisemitic discourse has entered both activist and academic arenas, and where Jewish activist girls, who represent a variety of thoughts, perspectives, and experiences, have limited opportunities to share them in Jewish and non-Jewish contexts, and, also, to feel a part of causes that they are committed to because of their multiple identities. A primary goal of this project is to show the complexity Jewish activist girls grapple with on a personal level and with others, and to make their knowledge known.

I come to this work with more than 25 years' experience working with, engaging with, and learning from Jewish girls in multiple contexts and capacities— as a religious school instructor, a girls' program facilitator, a friend, and a mentor to countless girls, some of whom are now women. While it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when my work with Jewish girls began— in 2002, when the fourth-grade girls in my religious school class and I would engage in deep and thoughtful conversations about Jewish ethical dilemmas? In 2008, after a moment of epiphany, I quit my job in search of a career that would enable me to work in a fuller capacity with Jewish girls? (I serendipitously found Moving Traditions, a Jewish organization that was planning to expand its work with Jewish girls in Boston.) These and other experiences have allowed me to reflect on different points in my own Jewish girlhood and to understand the richness and complexity of Jewish girls' lives. While I have admired their strength, courage, and creativity, I have also been frustrated by the ways in which they are sometimes infantilized, objectified, underestimated, underserved, and misunderstood by Jewish communities and society at large.

Jewish tradition teaches us to ask questions and encourages us to leave the world in a better place than we found it. In 2013, I made the decision to pursue doctoral studies. I noticed that many of the girls with whom I worked— the majority of whom were White, and middle-class— were struggling with issues related to gender and sexual identity, body image, perfectionism, anxiety, and relationships. I was inspired by the Jewish feminist organization Ma'yan's nascent scholarship, which indicated that the trends I witnessed among the Jewish girls I knew were being experienced more widely within the population of White, middle-class Jewish girls. In particular, I latched onto their framing of the "Supergirl dilemma," a nomenclature first coined by Girls Inc. (2006) to describe girls' struggles with perfectionism (Benjamin & Gordon, 2008). Over time, I came to see this as a reductive way of looking at Jewish girls since it only focused on one segment of the population. Moreover, my approach to working with girls came from a position of wanting to "help" them rather than seeing them from a position of strength.

When I first began doctoral studies, I did not realize that girls' studies existed as a field of academic discourse or that there was a body of literature for Jewish girls to be absent from. I quickly became exposed to some difficult truths. Research on Jewish girls did not exist, nor were they discussed in any of the literature I read or educational conferences I attended. Why wasn't anyone writing about Jewish girls? How could their experiences become known? Did the discourse I wanted to create matter? What was my place within girls' studies and academia? A few experiences, including the 2016 National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) conference, shook me to my core. The year prior, the NWSA— an organization I highly regarded as a women's studies student in college— voted on a platform to adopt sanctions against Israel. While I am critical of Israel in many ways, this felt particularly divisive and anti-feminist since it shut down opportunities for feminists to discuss the conflict between Israel and Palestine, and it felt antithetical to feminist practice since Jewish women who supported Israel and also supported the organization had to choose between one or the other. Until recently, I thought of feminism and the NWSA as "open-tent" movements, where I could be my full self and not have to choose between my different identities. bell hooks (1999) writes, "Rarely, if ever, are any of us healed in isolation. Healing is an act of communion" (p. 215), which we all so desperately need. Several Jewish members left the NWSA as a result. I felt invisible and confused—where did my discourse belong? Where did I belong?

In the years that followed, other hostilities arose in feminist spaces that I cared about, including Chicago's 2017 Dyke March and the 2019 National Women's March, which was founded as a non-partisan movement to unite women against Donald Trump's presidency.[2][3] I felt torn between my identity loyalties as a White Jewish feminist who cared about Israel and opposed the occupation of Palestine, yet I also felt silenced by the Antisemitic rhetoric. My curiosity translated over to the girls with whom I hoped to work. I wanted to know what it was like for Jewish activist girls to grow up amidst these tensions and how they informed the girls' sense of activism and belief systems. I was also curious to understand the influence of race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, geographic location, family context, social community, and family history on girls' meaning-making experiences.

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[2] Participants whose flags contained Jewish stars were ejected on the grounds that they were triggering for Palestinian participants (Sales, 2017).

[3] Tamika Mallory, one of the March organizers, posted a picture on her Instagram account with Louis Farrakhan, who has openly made several Antisemitic statements. Leaders in the Women's March movement refused to disavow his statements, which triggered accusations of Antisemitism within the Women's March movement and

Problem Statement

In recent years, girls' studies literature has been criticized for its singular focus on the experiences of White, middle-class girls, from which developmental theories about girls were initially derived (Strzepek, 2015; Ward & Benjamin, 2004). While the scholarship has since grown to include the experiences of more diverse girlhoods, such as girls of color, Muslim girls, girls from the Global South, indigenous girls, LGBTQ+ girls, and girls from low-income communities, and explained the impact of these differences on their identity and development, Jewish girls are noticeably absent from the literature (Bettie, 2014, 2016; Brown, 2009; de Finney, 2014; Leadbeater & Way, 2007; McArthur & Muhammad, 2017; Monaghan, 2016; Switzer et al., 2016).[4] Similar to Jewish women, Jewish girls' invisibility has been attributed to assimilation, internalized Antisemitism, the assumption that Jewish girls are not worthy of study,

---

caused tensions between Jewish women who supported Israel and non-Jewish women and pulled many others in between.

[4] There is not much research on religious identity in general. Judaism is even more confounding since it is often treated as a religious identity, similar to Protestantism and Catholicism, though many Jews experience Judaism as an ethnic identity or a sense of peoplehood (MacDonald-Dennis, 2005).

or perhaps that “Jewishness” itself as a category is not distinctive, i.e., that what makes these girls distinctive is covered under other categories like race, class, and sexuality, which has resulted in an “othering” of their experiences (see Beck, 1983, 1998; Clark, 2000; Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1991, 1996; Weiner, 2019).[5] Consequently, Jewish girls are folded into research with other girls, and information about the diversity of their identities and meaning-making experiences is lost.

Yet the small and discrete pockets of research on Jewish girls’ lives suggest that Jewishness is an important identity that both enriches and challenges their lives and requires further exploration in the literature (see Benjamin, 2013; Benjamin & Gordon, 2008; Clark, 2000; Gold, 2012; Lichtenstein, 2013; Philips, 1997; Weiner, 2020). Instead, Jewish girls are left to wrestle with complex challenges related to mental health, sexism, intimacy, relationships— issues experienced by other girls— as well as Antisemitism, Israel, religion— in ways that can differ from other girls. This leaves unanswered questions, unspoken truths, and multiple possibilities about who they are and how they wish to be seen. This study utilizes a power-sharing approach by centering girls’ voices and viewing them as experts of their lived experiences (Collins, 2000, 2019; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1994). The findings will fill a critical gap in the dearth of knowledge about Jewish girls’ lives.

---

[5] While some of the research on girls and religion exoticizes them, victimizes them, or sees them at odds with their religion, other girl-centered approaches examine the complex intersections between race, religious identity, class, nationality, and ethnicity on girls’ lived experiences and views religion an important contributor to girls’ sense of agency (see Chan et al., 2015; McArthur & Muhammad, 2017; Patel, 2013; Regnerus et al., 2005).

Research Questions

This study aims to investigate the diverse experiences of Jewish girl activists who are engaged with and affiliated with Jewish communities. While they are not representative of the population as a whole, I have chosen to focus on this particular subgroup because I assume that they are thinking critically about issues that affect Jewish people and the world around them, which can in turn impact their identity development process. The goals are to understand how they see themselves, how they make meaning of their Jewish identities, and how they understand the multiplicities of their lives. The study examines the following questions:

RQ1: How do Jewish activist girls navigate their relationship to voice, visibility, and representation?

RQ2: What are the unique challenges experienced by Jewish girl activists?

RQ3: How do Jewish girl activists exercise resistance against the challenges they experience?

Jewish Girls in America

While Jews constitute approximately 2.4% of the United States population (Pew Research Center, 2020a), the current scholarship on Jewish adolescent girls reveals a distorted picture, as it does not reflect the realities of all Jewish girls in America, or comprehensive information about their lives. The majority of research about Jewish girls and —Jewish life in America—reflects a White, privileged Jewish perspective and focuses on a narrow definition of Jewish identity and continuity (Berman et al., 2018; Sales, 2018). The girls whose experiences are centered are typically White (Ashkenazi) and middle-class. They live in major cities and participate in mainstream Jewish religious life and community through day schools, camps, synagogues, youth groups, and other organized programs (see The Jewish Education Project &

Rosov Consulting, 2016, 2019; Weiner, 2020; Whitehead-Bust, 2010). While this represents the experience of many Jewish girls in America, it also presents a homogenized view of who Jewish girls are and how they derive meaning from Judaism.[6] These dominant ideas silence the voices and perspectives of other Jewish girls and flatten their experiences (Kafrissen, 2018; Sales, 2018).

This reinforces what Adichie (2009) refers to as the "danger of a single-story narrative," which limits possibilities for understanding the strengths and complexities of all Jewish girls, particularly Jewish girls of color, girls who are adopted, multiracial, interfaith, differently abled, girls who identify with more than one faith, are Jewish by choice, and/or do not participate in Judaism in traditional ways.

Kelman et al. (2019) estimate that while a considerable number of Jews in America identify as non-White, they are often overlooked and underrepresented in Jewish communal studies.[7] This is particularly concerning since Jews of Color are a growing population in America

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[6] According to the most recent Pew Research Center (2020) study, the Jewish adult population in America is 2.4%. This includes 5.8 million adults and 1.8 million children.

[7] Since Jews of Color are consistently excluded and/or underrepresented in Jewish communal and/or demographic studies, it is difficult to predict the exact numbers in America. According to Kelman et al. (2019), researchers have operated under the assumption that most Jews are White in previous research. It is also important to note that this is a subjective term. While some non-White Jews may choose to identify according to this term, others may not. Some non-White Jews use this nomenclature to identify themselves in social science discourse or in activist spaces. It is important to consider the role of power in naming one's experience.

(Kelman et al., 2019).[8] Kelman et al. (2019) attribute the omission of Jews of Color to flawed research methodologies— inconsistent wording in surveys and questionnaires, misleading questions— and the overall failure of researchers to include Jews of Color and Jews of mixed heritage in survey instruments. This can make it challenging for Jewish girls of color to locate themselves within the context of the American Jewish community.

The Current Experiences of Jewish Adolescent Girls

In Ma'yan's 2008 national study of more than 200 Jewish girls, Benjamin and Gordon (2008) noted that Jewish girls are in many ways a "thriving" population— they are "leading their extracurricular activities, bettering the world around them, excelling in sports, and matriculating to elite universities" (p. 4). While the same holds true today, they are also living in a context where gun violence, police brutality, racial justice issues, reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and anti-Israel rhetoric dominate sociopolitical discourse. Like Jewish girls and women who came before them, Jewish girls are active in causes around them (see Antler, 2018; Nadell, 2016b). They are leading initiatives, rallies, and clubs to take a stand for or against issues they care about. At the same time, girls must also contend with the impact of COVID-19, which disrupted their normal way of life and resulted in devastating losses (Radhakrishnan et al., 2022). Two-and-a-half years into the pandemic, Jewish girls and their peers missed out on important developmental milestones, including high school graduations, sleepovers, dating, proms, summer camp, first jobs, college visits, and other trials and tribulations that come with adolescence.

---

[8] According to the Pew Research Center's (2020) study on Jewish Americans, 15% of Jews in the 18-29 age range identified as Hispanic, Black, Asian, multiracial or another race, compared to 12% in the 30-49 age range, and 4% in 50-64 in the age range.

Intersectionality

While intersectionality could help explain Jewish girls’ unique relationship to privilege, marginalization, and meaning-making, they are largely excluded from this discourse due to the fact that they are largely read as White and because Antisemitism is not seen as a valid form of oppression within intersectionality discourse (Brettschneider, 2016; Brahm, 2019; Schraub, 2019). The concept of intersectionality was developed by critical legal policy scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to describe the unique discrimination experienced by Black women due to the way that their race- and class-based identities interact with one another. In her seminal article, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Anti-racist Politics,” Crenshaw explained that under existing oppression frameworks, discrimination was treated as a single-axis issue. When it came to matters of discrimination, members with the most power— such as Black men in discussions of Blackness and/or White women in discussions about women— Black women were consistently marginalized. This obscured the needs of those who were most vulnerable— in this case, Black women, who were “multiply burdened” by the intersection of their racial and gendered identities.

Crenshaw (1989) notes, “Black women are caught between ideological and political currents that combine first to create and then to bury Black women's experiences” (p. 160). Crenshaw and other intersectionality theorists (see Collins, 2000, 2019) emphasize that because the gender discrimination Black women face is always “raced” and the racism they experience is always “gendered,” they simultaneously inform one another. Crenshaw (2017) and others (see Cho et al., 2013; Collins, 2000) have since expanded on understandings of intersectionality to locate the experiences of individuals from doubly, triply, and quadruply marginalized identity groups, such as Indigenous peoples, queer people, differently abled people, other non-White races, poor people, and people in the developing world, with White, able-bodied, affluent cisgender men serving as the locus of power. Moffitt et al. (2020) explain that intersectionality "offers a lens through which to examine the construction of a given social identity category, both in terms of the heterogeneity it may encompass and the fluidity with which it may be applied, enacted, and understood across time and contexts" (p. 3).

Intersectionality has been interpreted as a heuristic to understand the multiple barriers imposed on members of marginalized groups through their physical and social environments (Crenshaw, 1991; Salskov, 2020). Crenshaw (1991) provides an important exemplar in "Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color," where she describes the hardships experienced by women of color when they attempt to leave abusive relationships. For example, a woman of color may refrain from calling authorities out of loyalty to the Black community or fear that police will not believe her. She may also lack the financial resources to leave an abusive situation due to the impact of structural racism or lack the language skills (if she is non-English speaking) to know how to reach a place of safety.

Collins (2000) believes that intersectionality functions through a matrix of domination that creates different realities for those with and without power. It consists of four separate but overlapping domains: structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal, which work together to suppress alternative forms of thought. Collins (1990) emphasizes the importance of coalition building, where members of marginalized groups can work together to make their thoughts and experiences known:

> Each group speaks from its own standpoint and shares its own partial, situated knowledge. But because each group perceives its own truth as partial, its knowledge is

> unfinished. Each group becomes better able to consider other groups' standpoints without relinquishing the uniqueness of its own standpoint or suppressing other groups' partial perspectives. (Collins, 1990, pp. 236-237)

At the same time, Collins acknowledges that it can be difficult for people to work together if they share different understandings of each other's victimization and oppression. Moreover, while she views intersectionality as a powerful vehicle for effecting social change, she is also critical of its emphasis on Whiteness.

While intersectionality has been widely adopted by activists and scholars to describe different oppressions, some critics are perplexed by its ambiguity (see Hancock, 2007; Nash, 2008; Salskov, 2020). Others are confused by its ambiguous taxonomy— it has been referred to as "a theory," "a framework," "a theory of marginalization," "a theory of identity," a "nodal point," "a perspective," or "a method," which creates confusion regarding its use and its application (Salskov, 2020, p. 2). In recent years, tensions have arisen as different groups and individuals have debated their foothold within intersectionality politics, creating "a hierarchy of victimhood" where one's sense of belonging is arbitrary and fleeting (Shapiro, as cited in Coaston, 2019). This has led to fractured relationships and divided loyalties in both academic settings and activist arenas, particularly in far-left spaces. While part of this stems from the definitional ambiguity of intersectionality, others feel that the term has become co-opted by White, cisgender people and excluded those whose needs are meant to be centered (Helena, 2020, para. 66).

Collins (2015) feels that the term is inappropriately applied by people who are unable to grasp its complexity. Soave (2019) emphasizes that "understanding what [intersectionality] means and where it comes from is essential for comprehending the current state of activism on college campuses, at protests in major cities, and elsewhere" (p. 58). This can divide people over whose oppression matters and who has the right to decide, particularly in academic contexts and activist playing fields. It has also led to a political backlash, not only from people on the right but also from liberals who resist the effort to elevate identity politics over other concerns, such as economic inequality. Soave feels that it is important for young people to understand the goals and aims of intersectionality since they “are taught to perceive all social issues through the lens of interrelated oppression and to find more grievances to add to the pile” (Soave, 2019, p. 58). This can result in an alienating experience for Jewish girls, given that Antisemitism and matters pertaining to Israel are rarely made visible in intersectionality discourse, notwithstanding other aspects of their identities, such as their gender identity, their class identity, and their race.

Jewish Girls and Intersectionality

This need to center Jewish girls in intersectionality discourse is articulated by Jewish girls themselves in *No Diving*, the Fall 2020 issue of *Jgirls Magazine*. This issue is dedicated to explaining how girls experience the intersection between COVID-19 and systemic racism.[9] The editors, who see themselves as privileged, write, “We must not be content staying afloat while our neighbors drown” (Poole & Sippy, 2020, p. 2). Building on the idea that swimming represents movement and pools represent freedom, they further proclaim that “until we can all swim freely, we need to close the pool” (p. 2), which signals their belief in equity for all people, regardless of race, gender, class, and/or religion. The magazine, which features photography, drawings, poetry, essays, and a play, provides an important window into the experiences of contemporary Jewish girl activists and indicates where they find themselves in the midst of the current crises.

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[9] In March of 2020, COVID-19, an infectious disease, became known as a worldwide pandemic that effectively “shut down” the world for almost two years. More than six million people worldwide have died from the highly contagious virus (British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC], 2022).

In one article, Makeda Zabot-Hall (2020), a Jew of Color, author, wrestles with the burden her father carries as a Black man and the rage she feels when her father is unable to defend himself against the forces of White supremacy. She describes an experience her father had when he applied for a job and the White store owner hurled racial epithets against him. She reflects that:

> My father chose us. He chose to come home instead of lying on a rug in a pool of blood, alone, and unable to defend the skin that would be soaked in the very red that is printed on the flag of a country that promised to protect him. (Zabot-Hall, 2020, p. 20)

While she understands the difficult choices her father must make to survive as a Black man in America, she is frustrated and angry at the system that created them.

In another piece, a White Jewish girl (anonymous) evaluates the meaning of her life during COVID-19. She vacillates between the mundane and profound, like many girls her age: She writes, “If I don’t get abs quick, learn a new language, will I have lost this hidden opportunity?” (p. 30) and, “If I die today, will my life have meant something? Am I too young to change the world, or am I too old to start?” (p. 31). The girls’ writings— which center the perspectives of a small and specific population of Jewish girls in America— indicate that they are wrestling with important issues that require further examination in the identity-based literature.

Jewish Preclusion from Intersectionality Discourse. Jews’ preclusion from intersectionality discourse has been attributed to a number of reasons— their presumed

Whiteness, their access to privilege,[10] anti-Zionist sentiments within academia and social justice movements, and the failure of non-Jews to see Antisemitism as a valid form of oppression (see Brahm, 2019; Branfman, 2019; Brettschenider, 2016). According to Brettschneider (2016), this is problematic since it cancels out the experiences of Jews who hold other marginalized identities, such as being queer, non-White, and/or differently abled, and homogenizes their experiences. Moreover, it excludes Jews of Color from the canon of feminist thought and reinforces racial hierarchies within Judaism. Branfman (2019) notes that "this racial instability—neither (always) "White" nor "People of Color"—is a major factor that makes Jewishness slippery to progressive analysis" (p. 143). Schraub (2019) expands upon this point in his discussion on Jews and Whiteness. He feels that it is important to examine this relationship since the convergence of these identities manifests in negative stereotypes that can provoke Antisemitism against Jews. He claims that Whiteness "*does*" something to Jews by inflaming negative stereotypes about them. "Whiteness seems to inflect, in serious and fundamental ways, the understanding of what it means to be Jewish" (Schraub, 2019, p. 389).

While Whiteness is equated with normative ways of being in the world, when paired with Judaism, it renders notions of greed and contempt, and Jews' Whiteness becomes "hypervisible". Antisemitism is also unique because it is a kyriarchical issue— it is one that "cuts across frames" (Schraub, 2019, p. 402). This, Schraub explains, does not usurp or displace other forms of marginalization such as racism or sexism. Rather, it provides an opportunity to include the unique discrimination experienced by White Jews and non-White Jews without erasing other forms of privilege White Jews hold, such as material privilege and/or gender privilege. Kaye/Kantrowitz (1996) advocates for a “more complex understanding of the process of ‘Whitening’" (p. 125).

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[10] Antler (2018) claims that Jewish women are not treated as a vulnerable population in the women's movement because of their middle-class status, a reality that is not as readily accessible to members of other racial and ethnic groups in America (Hartman & Sheskin, 2012; Lynn & Kanazawa, 2008). While the ascent to the middle class does not define the racial and/or socioeconomic story of all Jews in America, it plays an important role in the larger narrative of their assimilation and girls' and women's relationship to Judaism and activism at large.

Schraub (2019) and others (see Brodkin, 1989; Sarna, 2022; Stögner, 2021) further note that Jews’ relationship to Whiteness is conditional. That is, it can be taken away by those who hold power over them. While this experience is not unique to Jews, Antisemitism is an issue that single-handedly impacts their lives. However, it does not fit neatly into other oppression frameworks since White-presenting Jews can experience both privilege and oppression through this identity (Branfman, 2019; Schraub, 2019). According to Branfman (2019), many progressives are afraid to acknowledge Antisemitism for fear of being seen as allies of Israel, and complicit in the oppression of Palestinians, which contributes to Jewish invisibility. Moreover, given that a wide swath of Jewish Americans enjoy financial privilege compared to other racial/ethnic minorities, they are rendered “doubly marginal”: marginal to the majority culture, but also marginal among minorities (Biale et al., 1989, p. 27).

Antisemitism in Contemporary America. According to Jewish Studies historian Jonathan Sarna (1981, 2004, 2022), Antisemitism has existed alongside Jewish life in America. While there have been relative periods of tolerance and acceptance, Jews have also been exoticized, attacked, scapegoated, subjected to physical harm, vilified in print and media, and restricted from holding employment, attending universities, and visiting places of leisure at various points in time (Diner, 2004; Prell, 1999; Sarna, 1981, 2004). Historical patterns show that Antisemitism even thrives when Jews acculturate (Sarna, 2022). However, it is important to note that ultra-Orthodox Jews, who are identifiably Jewish by their dress, looks, etc., have disproportionately been the targets of the most recent wave of violent attacks (Sarna, 2022).

Upon the Jews' arrival in America from Brazil in 1654, Governor Peter Stuyvesant attempted to turn them away on account of their religion. In the 17th and 18th centuries, they were condescended to for their non-Christian faith. It was only in the middle of the 18th century that they and Protestants could establish synagogues and worship outside of their homes (Sarna, 2022). As droves of Jewish immigrants flooded the nation—first from Central Europe from 1830-1860 and then from Eastern Europe from 1880-1914, Jews were met with consternation by fellow Americans, who blamed them for matters ranging from failed crops in the south to losses in the civil war to overcrowding in urban centers (Diner, 2004; Sarna, 2022). Anti-Jewish sentiment was connected in part to anti-immigrant sentiment more generally (Sarna, 2004, 2022).

In the 1920s, right-wing groups coalesced around Nazism, fascism, racism, and other extremist causes, buoyed by prominent businessmen such as Henry Ford, who blamed the "International Jew" for the world's problems (Diner, 2004; Link, 2010; Logsdon, 1999). Matters improved significantly for American Jews after World War II when they became eligible for GI benefits (Brodkin, 1998). They were able to gain a foothold into America's middle class and become "off-White." Unlike other minorities, Jews were able to access higher education and advance in the workforce (Brodkin, 1998). Antisemitism gradually receded during this time, and a new era of religious acceptance for Jews and Catholics alike prospered in America (Sarna, 2004). While Jews enjoyed great economic prosperity and religious freedom during this time, their rising economic mobility was viewed as a threat by some. Negative depictions of Jews infiltrated the media, which suggested that they were somehow undeserving of their newfound success (Brodkin, 1999; Prell, 1999). Some of these images were created by Jews themselves

(Prell, 1999). Jews' rising status also imposed a barrier to their relationship with Black Americans, with whom they had been in an alliance around their shared marginalization (Sarna, 2022). However, some Jews maintained their loyalty to the Black American community by supporting the Civil Rights movement (Antler, 2018).

The 1960s represented another inflection point for Antisemitism (Diner, 2004). Tensions over Israel also began to emerge in activist movements during the 1960s and 1970s. These were exacerbated by the War of 1967. Whereas many Zionist Jews felt a newfound loyalty to Israel, other activists felt that Israel was a White colonialist entity that forcibly seized land from Palestinians (Antler, 2018; Beck, 1988; Diner, 2004; Sarna, 2022). The 1967 Conference for a New Politics splintered the relationship between many Jewish, Black, and far-left activists over "a resolution declaring that the Six-Day War had been an 'imperialist Zionist war'" (Diner, 2004, p. 335).[11] Jewish activists who felt competing loyalties to Israel and other universal causes, such as women's rights and civil rights, felt shut out and conflicted, as if they had to choose between two different sides (Antler, 2018). Complicating matters was the fact that Antisemitism was not recognized as a valid form of oppression within activist movements, i.e., one that deserves widespread allyship and condemnation from others, which only furthered Jewish people's feelings of invisibility. Beck (1983, 1988) repeatedly and unsuccessfully advocated for the inclusion of Antisemitism into feminist discourse and praxis and the National Women's Studies Association's mission statement of causes it was committed to addressing.

Tensions over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have continued to pervade far-left activist spaces. For example, in 1975, the United Nations World Conferences on Women passed a "Zionism is Racism" plank, and in 1980, delegates at the International Women's Conference in

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[11] While Antisemitism and anti-Zionism are separate issues, they are often conflated with one another.

Copenhagen openly called for the elimination of Israel (Antler, 2018). Though a resolution to declare Zionism as racist was defeated at the 1985 United Nations World Conference on Women in Nairobi, many Zionist women felt defeated and isolated from the feminist movement (Antler, 2018). More recently, Jewish marchers whose flags contained images of the *Magen David* (Star of David), a symbol of Jewish identity that dates as far back as the 17th century and is also represented on Israel's flag, were ejected from the 2017 Dyke March in Chicago since their flags were disturbing to others (Sales, 2017).

Antisemitism today comes from many sources. The internet has led to a resurgence of Antisemitism on the far-right from neo-Nazis, White supremacists, Holocaust deniers, and conspiracy theorists who espouse theories that Jews are planning to replace White people and overthrow the government (Heikkilä, 2017; Meleagrou-Hitchens et al., 2020). Group members share vitriol by sharing memes and coded messages through social media platforms (Heikkilä, 2017). With few limits on free speech, they have been able to penetrate the ranks of public discourse (Heikkilä, 2017; Meleagrou-Hitchens et al., 2018; Sarna, 2022). White nationalists unleashed terror on Jews at a 2016 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, where the crowd cheered, "Jews will not replace us!" and a counter-protester was killed. In 2018, 11 Jewish people were killed while in prayer at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, the largest targeted loss of Jewish lives on American soil (Meleagrou-Hitchens et al., 2018). Another gunman opened fire at a Chabad in Poway, California, in April of 2019, killing one congregant and wounding several others (Van Sant & Doubek, 2019). Far-left African American militant groups have also been responsible for the death and destruction of Jews. In 2019, five people were killed at a kosher supermarket in Jersey City, and later that same year, a Hasidic rabbi was killed during a Hanukkah party in Monsey (Meleagrou-Hitchens et al., 2018; Sarna, 2022).

However, most Antisemitism on the far-left manifests in the form of decentering Jewish identity and conflating Jewishness and Israeli identity. College campuses and activist spaces are hotbeds for incidents such as these, where Jewish students and activists are assumed to be responsible for Israel's actions because they are Jewish, Israel's legitimacy is denied, and/or incidents of Antisemitism— such as defacing Jewish property— are downplayed or minimized (Arnold, 2022; Sarna, 2022; Wright et al., 2021). Data collected from Birthright applicants between 2017 and 2019 showed that many participants expressed increased concern about Antisemitism despite the fact that rates have remained fairly consistent since 2016 (Wright et al., 2021). Their feelings were attributed to the wider sociopolitical context, including the attacks in Pittsburgh, Charlottesville, and Poway, and also the content they consumed from news outlets.[12] While participants felt threatened by Antisemitism on their college campuses (37%), the majority of their concerns focused on the wellbeing of the nation (53%). Interestingly, participants' perceptions of Antisemitism were strongly correlated with their political orientation. Those who identified as conservative were more likely to report high levels of Antisemitism, particularly when it came to matters pertaining to Israel. While conservatives reported more *experiences* with Antisemitism, liberal Jews' *concerns* that they could be victimized by an attack outweighed those of their conservative peers. This could be due to the fact that they were more likely to equate their own marginalization with that of other marginalized groups. Regardless of their political orientation, Wright et al. (2021) note that young people's increased concerns could reflect fears of future Antisemitic violence and growing anxiety about their perceived otherness on college campuses and the world at large.

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[12] The surveys were of applicants to summer trips in 2017, 2018, and 2019. Participants were surveyed at three different time periods: approximately three months before the trip, approximately four months after the trip, and approximately 16 months after their trip.

Arnold (2022) has identified four types of Antisemitism that occur in far-left activist spaces but can also be applied to college campuses: reoccurring instances of open Antisemitism; normalizing criticism of Israel by making it seem typical and expected and denying its right to exist; discounting Antisemitism as a serious form of oppression when compared to other forms of oppression; and the Livingstone Formulation, in which a person who is accused of Antisemitism denies this charge and, instead, accuses the person of attacking them for an entirely different reason (see Livingstone, 2006). Living within this context has a profound effect on young Jews, many of whom are raised in contexts where they do not learn about the complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Zakai (2019, 2022) attributes this to teachers' discomfort with their topic and their assumption that students are incapable of nuanced thinking. Studies show that young people are grappling with the complexity of the conflict, they want more education around it, and they are more sympathetic to Palestinians than generations before them (Waxman, 2017; Zakai, 2022).

Zakai's (2022) longitudinal study with thirty-five Los Angeles area Jewish day school students revealed that young people have multiple relationships with Israel that change over time in accordance with their development. Adding to this point, Rosov (2018) examined how Jewish day school students' relationship to Israel changed over a seven-year period. Many participants felt that their high schools failed to provide them with an adequate understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Despite this, few students' feelings toward Israel changed from when they graduated to seven years later. Students fell into three groups: Devoted: Individuals who identified as Zionists and advocated for Israel without hesitation. They tended to come from

Israeli and/or religious households. Disengaged: They were detached and disinterested in Israel, despite possibly having had positive experiences there before, and Disillusioned: They cared about Israel but were frustrated by its politics. They resented the way American institutions represented Israel and wished that they had received a more nuanced education about Israel’s politics and history. Waxman (2017) observes that by and large, young people relate to Israel differently than previous generations, who grew up in the shadow of the Holocaust and can recall times when Israel’s existence was in jeopardy, such as the 1967 War. They have come of age with a powerful Israel, which compels them to grapple with its political actions and decisions. Waxman notes that “many young American Jews are critically engaging with it [Israel]— they are questioning, challenging, and criticizing, not simply accepting or endorsing what Israel does, or has done in the past” (Waxman, 2017, p. 181).

While it is important to understand how Antisemitism impacts the social context in which Jewish girls are being acculturated, they are given few opportunities to do so. Brahm (2019) views Jews’ exclusion from intersectionality literature (in effect if not in intent) as an “antisemitic instrument of abuse” (p. 165) since it ignores their longstanding history of persecution (i.e., the Holocaust) and the contemporary rise of global Antisemitism. He believes that intersectionality has become “the watchword, shibboleth, and passkey to belonging on the ‘woke’ Left, among the ‘politically correct’ who arrogate to themselves the duty of thought-policing the rest of us” (Brahm, 2019, p. 162). As a result, he is critical of intersectionality as a framework for promoting equality and understanding among oppressed peoples. Acklesburg (1996) claims that divisive politics over Israel and issues of religious diversity within Judaism can prevent Jewish activist girls and women from building necessary alliances within their own community, a benefit typically afforded to individuals. This can leave girls and women feeling isolated and vulnerable, which Beck (1988) describes as “radical otherness.” Branfman (2019) states that dominant paradigms in both Jewish and feminist thought pressure Jews to make a false choice: either *conflate* Antisemitism with colorist racism or *deny* their lived experience altogether (p. 138). It is also important to consider the silencing of Jewish women who do not support Israel and their contribution to feminist struggles. While they value Jewishness, they do not support the unquestioned nationalism of those who are pro-Israel and deny the Palestinian struggle.

Feminist psychologist Carol Gilligan (2019) similarly notes how Jewish women occupy a position of double consciousness since they are forced to “forget” their own unique history in America as it is not validated or acknowledged through mainstream discourses of oppression.[13] She notes, “It seems to me that White Jewish women, by occupying this dual position, embody a reality that cannot be known, spoken, or acknowledged” (Gilligan, 2019, p. 14).[14] While her explicit focus on Whiteness fails to include the experiences of non-White Jewish girls, her perspective requires further consideration given that Jewish girls may feel the need to suppress or edit their Jewish identities in order to conform to the expectations of others, or they may feel that their own life stories are insignificant.[15] With little progress made, these issues continue to dominate the activist landscape for Jewish adolescent girls today and impact how they express and navigate their identities.

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[13] The term “double consciousness” was identified in 1903 by W. E. B. Du Bois to describe the two different worlds he navigated as a Black man living in a White man’s world.

[14] She wrote this in response to an experience she had about navigating her Jewish identity with a group of non-Jewish women who were White and non-White.

[15] These perspectives are simply intended to show how Jewish scholars have approached the topic of intersectionality and Jews’ exclusion from it.

In their research with Muslim American teens in post-9/11 America, Sirin and Fine (2008) utilized Pratt's concept of *contact zones* to examine how participants understood themselves in relation to others. Pratt (1991) describes contact zones as spaces where "cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (p. 34). Sirin and Fine (2008) note that these moments can trigger deep-seated traumas, hopes, and losses in marginalized youth. "Youth import to social settings both their anxieties and their desires to belong; their collective memories of oppression, colonization, and cultural pride; their fantasies and projections; their fears and longings" (Sirin & Fine, 2008, p. 158). This framework is useful for examining the experiences of Jewish girls when their Jewish identification is invalidated or regarded as a contested identity by individuals who hold power over them.

Jewish Girls and Religion

Traditional Judaism

Judaism, like many other religions, is a patriarchal religion that is bound by the belief in one God and adherence to *halacha* (Jewish law), which consists of rabbinical teachings and *mitzvot* (Biblical commandments), guidelines for religious, ethical, and moral behavior (Gelernter, 2011).[16][17] Many *mitzvot* are gender-specific and grant religious privileges to males

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[16] While some religious Jews abbreviate the English word God," there is a prohibition against saying or writing the Hebrew name of God, YHWH.

[17] Jews choose to interpret and/or follow mitzvot in different ways, depending on their religious background and/or personal interpretation. People who identify as Orthodox tend to interpret mitzvot closely.

(Gelernter, 2011; Plaskow, 1990). This creates a gender hierarchy that begins in infancy and persists throughout the lifespan, much like other religions (Mikołajczak & Pietrzak, 2014). According to Heschel (1991), “the role differentiation between women and men is not without clear value assignment in traditional Judaism” (p. 33). While feminism has been a welcome influence in many aspects of Judaism, allowing for the establishment of new rituals, opportunities, and traditions such as bat mitzvah and women being included in the rabbinate, this largely depends on how one affiliates and whether they participate at all (Siegel, 1997). That said, in terms of gender, women have had to ask for “permission” to change the status quo, and equality has yet to be achieved in all aspects of Judaism.

Religious Denominations

Some girls are raised without religion, while others identify with one of Judaism’s three major movements— Reform, Conservative, or Orthodox— with Reconstructionist or Renewal being smaller yet significant, reflecting a model adopted by many American synagogues (Jones & Cox, 2017; Sarna, 2004). A recent study conducted by the Pew Research Center, *Jewish Americans in 2020,* indicated that 17% of Jews 18–29 identify as Orthodox. Eight percent of Jews ages 18–29 identify as Conservative, while 29% identify as Reform, indicating a major shift from previous generations, when the majority of Jews identified Reform or Conservative synagogues.[18] Forty-one percent do not identify with any denomination. Some are “post-denominational,” but most are just secular. These are the best estimates of Jewish adolescent girls, as data on teenage girls’ religious affiliations does not exist.

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[18] For example, in the 50-64 age group, 22% identify as Conservative and 35% identify as Reform. The numbers are even higher for the 65+ population: 25% identify as Conservative and 44% identify as Reform. In other words, Jews today are becoming more Orthodox and/or less likely to identify with a religious denomination.

Girls may belong to unaffiliated synagogues or *minyanim* (prayer groups), reflecting a growing "post-institutional" trend among American Jews (Tabachnick, 2017). While many female-identified people below college age follow the religious customs and beliefs of their parents, others examine their personal faith and spiritual beliefs during adolescence as part of their identity development process (Pearce & Denton, 2011). This is a common practice among girls and teens of all religions (Pearce & Denton, 2011).

Orthodox. While approximately 9% of America's Jews are Orthodox, the proportion of younger Jews who identify as Orthodox trends higher (Pew Research Center, 2020a). Orthodox Jews are America's fastest growing population, with an average of 3.3 children per family, compared to 1.4 in non-Orthodox Jewish families (Pew Research Center, 2020a). There is a great amount of heterogeneity within Orthodoxy; some of its branches include modern Orthodox, Hasidic, and Haredi, who are ultra-Orthodox, and Yeshivish, a Haredi subgroup, among others (Sarna, 2004).

Orthodox Jews adhere to the highest tenets of *halacha*. For example, while boys and men are permitted to read from the *Torah* (Jewish Bible) when they become *bar mitzvah* (a ceremony that marks their entry into Jewish adulthood) at age 13, girls and women are precluded from this *mitzvah*.[19] However, some institutions have begun to blur the gender binary in some ways and allow equal access for girls (Eleff & Butler, 2016; Joselit, 1994).

Orthodoxy and Gender. While some girls and women have questioned whether it is possible to develop a sense of agency within a highly prescribed tradition, others have asserted their feminist identities by wearing ritual items traditionally reserved for men, such as a *tallit* (a prayer shawl), and aspired to hold leadership positions typically occupied by men, including the rabbinate (Borschel-Dan, 2014; Nadell, 2016a). Their efforts have been supported by organizations such as Maharat, a seminary that ordains Orthodox female *rabbahs* (the female plural form of rabbi), and the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA), both of which provide learning opportunities to Orthodox girls and women.

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[19] Some modern Orthodox families host a parallel *bat mitzvah* ceremony for girls that includes reading from the torah.

Conservative. Conservative Jews constitute approximately 17% of the Jewish population in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2020a). Established as a middle ground between Orthodoxy and Reform, it enables people to live a Jewish life in a modern context. Until the 1980s, Conservative Judaism represented the largest movement in America (Goldstein, 1993; Pew Research Center, 2020a; Shapiro, 2013). However, its declining membership reflects changing patterns of religious engagement among Americans overall, where people are becoming less religious (Jones & Cox, 2017; Steinlauf, 2017).

Reform. The movement consists of approximately 850 member synagogues. It emphasizes modernity and innovation over adherence to *halacha* (Union for Reform Judaism, n.d.). Reform Jews have a tradition of supporting girls' and women's issues. The first female rabbi, Sally Priestand, was ordained through the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Reform rabbinic seminary in 1973, which paved the way for other women to achieve this position (Fishman, 2000).

Secular, Cultural, or Unaffiliated. Secular, cultural, or unaffiliated Jews are a growing population in America, with the majority of followers (40%) born after 1992 (Kosmin & Keysar, 2012; Pew Research Center, 2020a). According to the Pew Research Center (2020), the number of secular or unaffiliated Jews has increased over each generation due to rising rates of intermarriage, a lack of religious affiliation among Americans, and changes in the way that

Jewishness is acknowledged in survey terminology. For example, in the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, converts were recognized as “Jews by choice,” which reflected new ways of considering their experience (Kosmin & Keysar, 2012; Pew Research Center, 2020a).

The range of religious and cultural observance within this population varies. Some Jews maintain rich connections to Jewish culture and tradition by celebrating Jewish holidays, music, and foods, while others maintain few connections (Kosmin & Keysar, 2012). However, they do not belong to synagogues or affiliate with Jewish organizations.

Summary of Movements. While each movement creates expectations for Jewish girls based on its own interpretations of *halacha,* traditionalism, and ritual, there is a great deal of variation within each movement and space within it for girls to question and construct a meaningful Jewish identity.

Jewish Demography

Where a girl lives can greatly impact her access to Jewish community and her identity making experiences. While Jewish girls live in all four corners of the United States, the vast majority of Jews are concentrated in the Northeast, Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, and the Washington D.C. area (Pew Research Center, 2020a; Saxe et al., 2021). The most populous states include New York (21%), California (15%), and Florida (10%) (Saxe et al., 2021). Many communities in those states have resources and funding to support a wide array of Jewish religious and community-based program offerings, including synagogues, camps, day schools, and youth groups, all of which play a formative role in fostering positive Jewish identity in youth (Cohen & Kotler-Berkowitz, 2004; Cohen et al., 2011; Fishkoff, 2011; Kadushin et al., 2000; Whitehead-Bust, 2010).

Many girls who participate in Jewish religious and communal life are able to derive a sense of community, guidance, and mentorship from counselors, youth group leaders, and peers in these settings (The Jewish Education Project & Rosov Consulting, 2016, 2019; Whitehead-Bust, 2010). For example, a participant from Moving Traditions' monthly *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!* program for adolescent girls reported, "The bonds I forged between myself and the other girls were the strongest I had ever experienced" (Moving Traditions, 2015, p. 20), reflecting a fundamental shift in her identity. This is important since non-Orthodox Jewish girls show higher rates of religious fidelity than boys into adulthood— a pattern that is similar to that of girls of other religions, including Catholicism, Mormonism, and Protestantism— which raises questions about the socio-cultural factors that drive girls to cultivate a religious identity (see B'nai B'rith Youth Organization, 2008; Pew Research Center, 2015; Smith & Denton, 2005).[20] However, girls who are raised in ultra-Orthodox communities tend to have fewer interactions with secular society, which suggests that they undergo a different socialization process that also warrants further investigation (Fader, 2009).

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[20] In Pew Research Center's (2015) Religious Landscape Study, women exceeded men in terms of religious identification in about half of the religions identified. For example, 55% of women identified as Evangelical Protestants compared with 45% of men, and 54% of women identified as Christians compared to 46% of men. However, men ages 18-29 were more likely to identify as Christian than women at 18% versus 16%, which suggests that these rates could be subject to change. Similarly, 17% of both men and women ages 18-29 identified as Evangelical Protestants, which also suggests that women are becoming less religious or that men are becoming more so.

Jewish Families

Girls become members of Jewish families in many different ways. While some girls are born into nuclear families where both parents are Jewish, others are born into interfaith families where a non-Jewish parent may or may not practice another religion (Mehta, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2020a). They may also practice some or all of these traditions. Other girls are adopted by Jewish families from both the United States and abroad, where their birth parents' religion may be unknown (Rosenberg, 2006; Sartori & Guberman, 2013). Girls may participate in a special ceremony, such as a *Simchat bat* (a Jewish name conferral) and/or a *mikveh* (a Jewish ritual bath), to celebrate their conversion to Judaism (Fessler, 2001).[21] The United States is also home to Jewish girls born abroad, including those from Israel, the Former Soviet Union, South America, China, and others, on either a temporary or permanent basis (Pew Research Center, 2013). Other girls may decide to become Jewish of their own accord, or they may decide to convert to Judaism from another religion with their families.

While Jewish American girls are raised in families that represent all income strata and social classes, many are born into intellectually and materially privileged circumstances. Twenty-three percent of Jewish American families earn combined incomes of more than $200,000, in comparison with four percent of American households (Pew Research Center, 2020a). American Jews and other minorities, including Asians, are also distinct in their levels of educational attainment, which some scholars have attributed to cultural values that emphasize academic achievement and professional ambition in young people (see Chua & Rubenfeld, 2014;

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[21] However, these forms of conferral into Judaism are often not accepted by Orthodox rabbis in the United States. Orthodox and Conservative rabbis in the USA also do not accept the Jewishness of children who self-identify as Jewish under the Reform movement's decision on patrilineal descent.

Freedman, 2005). Sixty percent of Jewish adults hold college degrees, compared to 30% of the general United States population (Pew Research Center, 2020a). Given their access to wealth and quality education, these trends suggest that a higher proportion of Jewish girls are raised with access to healthier communities, including food, clean water, and fresh air, than non-Jewish girls. They also have more access to cultural capital and the ability to become exposed to events around the world (Benjamin & Gordon, 2008). While this does not speak to the experience of all girls, these factors can impact how girls understand their identities within the context of Jewish communities and in the world around them.

Researcher Perspective

My interest in understanding how Jewish adolescent girls navigate their relationship with voice, visibility, and representation as they construct their identities is personal. While I identify as a White, heterosexual, cisgender, 46-year-old Jewish woman, my Whiteness and all that it carries have become increasingly apparent to me in recent years. I grew up with the realization that I was not Black. I had a few classmates in my elementary school who were Black, and the difference between my skin and theirs was noticeable. Like many young White children, I did not see myself as having a race. As a Jew, I often felt “othered” in my predominantly Irish and Italian town. These feelings were influenced by interactions with peers, teachers, and coaches, who told me I was different; I was not like them. I was asked questions like, “Do you really not believe in Jesus?” or told things like, “That’s so sad that you don’t have a Christmas tree!” They also grew from the stories I was told about myself by family members, religious schoolteachers, and camp educators, who reminded me that while my difference made me special, it also made me, and those who came before me, a target of Antisemitism. I needed to wear my Judaism with pride. My Jewish difference was particularly noticeable during Christmastime, when we sang

Christmas songs and performed Christmas plays at school. I felt like an outsider having these experiences.

While my suburban community had a relatively small Jewish population, I was fortunate to travel through school with a cohort of eight peers, with whom I also attended preschool and religious school. The girls and I attended the “Jewish Brownies” together on Tuesdays since the regular Brownie troop met on Mondays. The uniqueness of our tradition earned us a lot of popularity during our B’nai Mitzvah year, as all of our classmates wanted to be invited to our parties.[22] However, it was not enough to protect us from the taunts and jeers from our non-Jewish classmates. As I grew older, it became commonplace for my male classmates to throw pennies at me and to direct Antisemitic slurs at me and my friends when we were at school. I was ridiculed for my “Jewish” nose and teased for my supposed mercenary ways. In high school, a Jewish friend and I shared a locker. One day we discovered that someone had etched a swastika into it. When the offending party was caught, the assistant principal told him, “Don't do it again.” While I attribute my peers’ behaviors to ignorance rather than deep-rooted Antisemitism, these experiences made me feel that my Jewishness set me apart from the dominant culture of my school.

These feelings of otherness were reinforced by the fact that most of my formative Jewish-identity building experiences occurred in spaces outside of my school. At the time, I did not realize that these spaces consisted of predominantly White Jews because this was my framework for understanding Judaism. When I was in the fourth or fifth grade, a biracial girl joined my Hebrew school class. I figured that she was not “fully” Jewish since I thought all Jews were White. My peers and I did not know what to make of her and her differences. While there was a Chinese girl in our class, I knew that she was adopted, so that was my way of understanding her Judaism. At the time, “Jewish” seemed like a construct, and the degree of a person’s Jewishness was determined by how “Jewish” they looked and how religious they were. I figured it was best to be somewhere in the middle. When I went to camp, my peers and I created a system to determine someone’s Jewishness based on how many days a week they attended religious school and whether they kept *kosher* at home.[23] I was one of the lucky ones because I got to eat cheeseburgers and I only had to go to religious school twice a week. For many of us, Judaism was tied to performance, obligation, and difference.

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[22] Bar Mitzvah, for boys and bat mitzvah for girls, is a Jewish rite of passage that is typically celebrated when boys are 13 and girls are either 12 or 13 when they read from the torah for the first time and mark the passage into Jewish adulthood. Over the past few decades, some Americans have been acknowledging this event with elaborate and expensive parties as a sign of assimilation (Joselit, 1994). Some people have adopted the term B’mitzvah to move away from a binary gender construct.

At the same time, I grew up with a strong sense of Jewish identity that was cultivated through my mother's side of the family. We celebrated holidays with my grandparents and cousins, many of whom lived nearby. I associated the history of my people with my Nanny Franny’s mandel bread and chicken soup, recipes she learned from her own mother. I keep these and many others in a weathered pink tin box, an important vestige of my maternal history. When I was in college, I went to visit Nanny Franny in Florida. She sent me back to campus with heavy containers of her frozen chicken soup— her antidote to all the world’s problems. I schlepped them on a 20-hour train ride back from Delray Beach to New Orleans, the city where I fell in love with oak trees and learned to trust my voice with encouragement from friends and mentors— because the soup meant so much more than carrots and strained meat. It represented love, pride, commitment, and determination— traits I inherited from my family.

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[23] Keeping *kosher*, or following *kashrut*, refers to Jewish dietary laws around food that are stated in the *Torah*, the Jewish Bible.

I also attended Jewish summer camps and youth groups where we spoke about Jewish identity and participated in Israeli folk dancing, social activism, and text study. Living between two disparate worlds, I struggled to integrate aspects of my Jewish life into the other parts. I grew up hearing how my great-grandparents arrived in America as empty-handed Jewish immigrants. With time and hard work, they were able to create a comfortable life for their family. I came to understand that education and family were the pathways to success, and it was my responsibility to keep the traditions and memories of previous generations alive. As I grew older, I learned to challenge the expectations that came with this identity and to reinvent them for myself. However, my feelings of otherness continued to define me. I found comfort in building connections with other Jews, particularly those who were oriented toward social justice and progressive causes.

From a young age, probably in high school, I identified as a feminist, though I didn't get all the politics and intricacies of what truly committing to this identity entailed. Growing up in an unstable home with an emotionally and sometimes physically abusive father and living in a culture where talking about these issues was considered taboo, I struggled with feelings of anger, confusion, and guilt. My mother often became frustrated over my need to make an issue out of everything, to take a stand, and to see justice delivered. As I grew older, I realized that justice doesn't always prevail and isn't necessarily guaranteed since power rests largely in the hands of White, wealthy, conservative-minded men. At the same time, I didn't understand the disproportionate privilege I held as a White, educated woman who always had a roof over her head and someone to love her. I could decide whether I wanted to make an issue of something or not, and even if I didn’t get the outcome I desired, in most cases, I didn’t have to worry about the consequences of making my voice heard. While I often felt unheard at home when my father was around, I felt that I could project the anger, confusion, and frustration I felt in other contexts, such as my women’s studies classes in college.

Until I went back to school for my doctoral studies, I was still pretty much under the impression that feminism was a “we’re all in it together” game. I was liberal and “woke.” I wasn’t racist. I had spent years working in informal Jewish education, and I had the impression that Jewish girls were not being listened to or heard. I was also concerned about other people’s oppression. I was sailing through my program, or so I thought, when a few incidents occurred that forced me to wrestle with my own racial identity. Moreover, I realized that I would need to do this to truly understand girls and be able to work with them. In the spring of 2015, I took Dr. Amy Rutstein-Riley’s *Girlhood, Identity, and Girl Culture* class. I walked into the class feeling aloof and knowledgeable. I thought that as a Ph.D. student among a sea of undergraduate students where we would discuss themes related to feminist theory and girlhood, I had little to learn. Moreover, my skill set and maturity would far outweigh my peers’. I would have that mindset checked really fast. My classmates and teaching assistants repeatedly called me out for my colloquialisms: using “we” when I meant “I”; the inaccurate assumptions I made, which reflected my own White, middle-class experience; “We all live in houses;” the ways in which I took up space by speaking over others and dismissing their ideas; and so on. I also realized my overall discomfort when interacting with girls of color, though I tried to be as authentic as possible. I thought about dropping the class several times because I was angry and defensive.

I not only stayed with the class, but I continued as a researcher for two years and gained important wisdom from the many girls, students, and staff who were involved with the program.

In 2019, I was asked to co-teach the course. While many parts were wonderful, I also struggled with how to manage power dynamics and engage in authentic relationships and communication with colleagues, teaching assistants, and students. I lacked confidence in my own teaching abilities because I didn't know how to navigate the identities I held as a White, 40-something, middle-class Jewish professor, and I didn't know who I was supposed to be in the space. The course and The Girlhood Project —the girl-serving program situated within the course— were predicated upon a feminist pedagogical model, but what did it mean if we didn't know how to do it ourselves? I felt the need to constantly censor myself: "What was I saying?" and "How was I saying it?" "Did I sound racist?" Several of the teaching assistants and both program assistants were women of color, and I constantly worried about offending them or sounding "too White." By exercising authority, as aspects of my job required me to do, I worried that I was coming across as demonstrative and exclusionary.

As the semester went on, I began to feel alienated from the core group that developed between the program assistants and several of the teaching assistants. They were clearly offended by my behavior, but I didn't really understand why. If I didn't know what I was doing, how could I stop? My teaching colleague sometimes served as a mediator between myself and the others. She was several years younger than me and also White, but more engaged in her work on racial identity. After a painful end of the semester, which ended with a debriefing session where a few team members accused me of being racist, I realized a few things: race is a personal issue for everyone, and while I was deeply hurt by the incident, I could only learn and grow from it. It was up to me to educate myself about my Whiteness and learn how to upend the White supremacy I was promoting. I also realized that while *I* felt that my Jewishness placed me into a category of otherness, they didn’t see it. They didn’t understand the significance it held for me. The fact remained that I was White, and I benefited from White privilege.

Another moment of reckoning occurred when I took a class on Participatory Action Research at Boston College. Despite being a Catholic university, several of my classmates were Jewish, making me feel less alone. As part of the course, we attended the People’s Institute for Human Survival and Beyond Undoing Racism Conference, a weekend-long conference where we discussed the causes of systemic racism and the reasons why it festers and persists in America. On the second day of the training, one of the facilitators — a White woman— asked participants to sit in a circle. She asked all the White participants, round-robin style, to say what they liked about being White. When she got to the friend who I immediately connected with in the class— a young Jewish woman— my friend replied, “I’m not White, I’m Jewish.” The facilitator, Diana, told her, “You’re White.” They argued about this for a few moments. My friend told her, “I’m not White, I’m Jewish. My grandparents were in the Holocaust.” The facilitator told her, “It doesn’t matter. You’re still White.”

I was glad that my friend went before me, because my immediate response would also have been to say, “I’m Jewish.” I remember the room well— where my friend sat and where I sat. When it was my turn, I answered the question. I said something straight out of Peggy McIntosh that I do not recall, but my reply wasn’t sincere— perhaps that I like being White because I know that the police will believe me when I need their help? While this is true, I remember my friend's response more than mine. Was I White or Jewish? White and Jewish? A White Jew? Did my Jewish identity matter? Or was it only conditionally important, like when White supremacists wanted to hunt Jewish people down? Sure, I was White, but I was also Jewish!

These experiences have had a profound impact on me. They have shaped my self-awareness, my understanding of my positionality, and my approach to working with students and girls. I have a greater awareness of where my blind spots are and the ways that I need to be open to the experiences of others. I have learned to become a better listener and to own my assumptions. I am learning to lean into challenging situations to push my personal boundaries, even when it's hard. With a great deal of reflection (and I still have more to do), I decided to return to the Girlhood classroom in 2020, and I'm glad that I did. I came back stronger and better prepared to lead the class. However, throughout my teaching, I have noticed that there is little theory to draw upon when it comes to discussing the experiences of Jewish girls. They are all but absent in girls' studies discourse. I'm curious to better understand the reasons behind their invisibility, to understand who Jewish girls are, and to uplift their experiences.

That said, I think that it is important to articulate key factors that could limit my understanding of who Jewish girls are and the issues that are important to them. My experience is primarily limited to White Jewish girls (save for the occasional Jewish girl of color), who range from unaffiliated to modern Orthodox, and who are somewhat familiar with aspects of Jewish life, culture, and tradition. While I briefly worked with Jewish girls in Israel, many of whom were recent immigrants from countries such as Romania, Russia, and Ukraine, I am most familiar with American-born girls who come from predominantly middle-class communities and who live in areas where they have access to the Jewish community. While I am open to other ways of identifying with and being Jewish, it is difficult to divorce myself from my own experiences of having to navigate my secular and Jewish identities and living in a household where I experienced financial insecurity and domestic violence. I am proud to be the daughter of a survivor, yet I spent many years feeling embarrassed by my family's circumstances, particularly when my friends, who mostly grew up in middle-class nuclear families, couldn’t relate to my experience. I felt badly about myself, as though I was different from them. I am still learning how to make sense of my family’s trauma while not letting it define me. I am sloughing away to find my place and identity as well as to figure out where I fit in my community and in the dominant society.

Researcher Assumptions

My bias can impact the way that I respond to the data because I have a specific way of viewing Jewish identity. To begin with, I am White. This means that when I enter a Jewish space, such as a synagogue, people never question why I am there, and they are not alarmed by my presence. On occasion, people have asked me if I am Jewish, which means that while I can be singled out on account of this identity, I also “belong” because of the way I look. This is not the case for all girls. While I try to challenge these assumptions, I too have a set idea of what a Jewish girl is supposed to look like: she is White; cisgender; lives in a fairly nuclear family; participates in Jewish identity-building experiences, such as camp, synagogue, day school, or religious school; has a bat mitzvah; is raised with lots of family, Jewish food, and holidays; and she and her family uphold progressive values.

The Jewish girls I have worked with have been raised in similar contexts. Many attend Jewish day schools, Jewish camps, and synagogues. Even within the Jewish community, they represent a minority of Jewish girls. While it can be challenging to learn new ways to understand and interpret Jewish girls’ lives, I hope that this awareness will enable me to listen in a way that honors their multiple experiences.

Rationale and Significance

This research will demonstrate how Jewish girl activists construct knowledge about their lives. It also describes the barriers they face in accessing Jewish spaces, what they care about, what they value in Jewish life, what being Jewish means to them, and how they see themselves in the context of their communities. It begins to chip away at building broader understandings of the multiplicities of Jewish girls' lives.

The findings will increase Jewish girls' visibility in girls' studies and other areas of Jewish education and community-based practice. This could lead to newer and more comprehensive educational initiatives, funding priorities, and policy decisions that benefit Jewish girls. Jewish girls who participate in the study may feel validated and seen, which could lead to short-term benefits such as an increased sense of empowerment and connection. Finally, the knowledge gleaned from this study could play an important role in expanding definitions of girlhood to include other populations who are also excluded from girls' studies and/or Jewish communal literature. It could also be instructive for those who work with populations of girls who are "missing" from the literature, such as trans girls, girls who struggle with mental health issues, and girls with disabilities, as well as marginalized non- and anti-Zionist girls.

Definition of Key Terminology

Given that identity construction is a complicated process, there are several terms that require further definition:

Jewish Girls: This population includes adolescent girls and girl-identifying individuals ages fourteen to eighteen who are adopted, multiracial, and interfaith, as well as those who identify with more than one faith or who are Jewish by choice. Jewish girls comprise many races and ethnicities, including *Ashkenazi* (Eastern European), *Mizrahi* (Middle Eastern or North African), and *Sephardic* (Spanish-speaking). While each group has its own religious customs and traditions, *Ashkenazi* are the most populous group in America (Saxe et al., 2021), which lends itself to notions of "Ashkenormativity" in discussions about Jewish life in America (see Kutzik, 2019).[24]

Jewish Identity: Jewish identity is a constantly evolving concept, particularly for teens who are actively exploring their identities (see Kadushin et al., 2000; Pearce & Denton, 2011; The Jewish Education Project & Rosov Consulting, 2016). There is also a diverse range of religious identifications among Jewish girls in America. While some Jewish girls are raised without religion, others identify with one of Judaism's major movements (e.g., Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, or Renewal), reflecting a model adopted by many American synagogues (Pew Research Center, 2020a; Sarna, 2004). Girls may also claim that they are secular Jews, or "Jews of no religion" (Pew Research Center, 2013), where they identify with cultural rather than religious aspects of Judaism (Jones & Cox, 2017).

While ways of understanding Jewish identity have changed over time, scholars have yet to agree on a universal definition and whether it is shaped by relationships, beliefs, or behaviors (see Cohen & Eisen, 2000; Horowitz, 2002; Kelman et al., 2017; Sklare, 1971).[25] A 2019 report commissioned by the Jewish Education Project among a nationwide sample of 17,576 teens from 14 different youth-serving organizations found that the majority of participants attributed their

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[24] Jonathan Kutzik (2019) defines Ashkenormativity as the dominant belief that all American Jews are exclusively of Ashkenazi heritage. As a result, they privilege Ashkenazi Jewish culture, ethnicity, and tradition as a mainstream and universal Jewish practice.

[25] It is important to note that the data from which these theories were derived comes from individuals who engage in Jewish life, community, and practice to a certain degree.

Jewish identity to relationships, culture, and peoplehood. At the same time, most participants were reluctant to describe themselves as religious, though certain aspects of Judaism were important to them, such as celebrating holidays and life cycle events with their families and connecting with Jewish peers (The Jewish Education Project & Rosov Consulting, 2019).

My definition of Judaism extends to anyone who considers themselves Jewish. In all study documents, including the study flier and recruitment emails, I note that the study is open to "Jewish-identifying" individuals. This affirms my commitment to expanding definitions of who counts as a Jew.

Antisemitism: Deborah Lipstadt (2020) states that Antisemitism is "disliking someone because they are a Jew. It has a structure and it is persistent" (p. 3). While Antisemitism dates back to antiquity,[26] it can manifest in many ways, including negative propaganda against Jews, desecration of Jewish sites, and physical harm against Jews. Various definitions exist regarding what constitutes Antisemitism and how it should be defined (T'ruah, n.d.). According to the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, "Antisemitism is discrimination, prejudice, hostility or violence against Jews as Jews (or Jewish institutions as Jewish)" (T'ruah, n.d., para. 8), meaning that it is a form of hatred that targets Jews for being Jewish.

Understandings of Antisemitism have become muddled over people's different ways of interpreting criticism against Israel (T'ruah, n.d.). In 2016, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) established a non-legally binding "working definition" of

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[26] While many people believe that Antisemitism first entered the public consciousness during Hitler's Final Solution, this is not the case. Jewish discrimination can be traced back to 106–43BC, when politician and lawyer Cicero expressed consternation against Jews with the claim that they are "influential in informal assemblies" (Phillips, n.d., para. 17).

Antisemitism that was adopted by more than thirty countries. Seven of the eleven conditions outlined by the IHRA focused on the State of Israel, for example, "applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation" (IHRA, 2019, para. 19) and "holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel" (IHRA, 2019, para. 22). It was subsequently critiqued by politicians and academics on the Left on the grounds that it limited criticism of Israel and promoted racism (Ayyash, 2020; Shanes & Waxman, 2021). The Jerusalem Declaration of Antisemitism was developed in 2021 by scholars, academics, and activists in the fields of Jewish studies, Middle Eastern studies, and Holocaust history to create a clearer definition that clarified the relationship between Antisemitism and anti-Zionism.

The Jerusalem Declaration claims that Antisemitism occurs in cases where Israel's legitimacy is denied, when Antisemitic symbols such as swastikas are associated with Israel, when people are expected to publicly express their disagreement with Israel's actions, when they assume that Jews are more loyal to Israel than their own country, and when all Jews are held accountable for Israel's policies and decisions. However, it has been critiqued by Palestinian leaders on the grounds that it silences Palestinians and reinforces Israeli nationalism (Ayyash, 2021). Arnold and Taylor (2019) state that exclusion and group stigmatization serve as two criteria by which criticism of Israel becomes Antisemitic. While Israel should be held accountable for its abuses against Palestinians, it becomes problematic when Israel is held to a higher standard than other nations by activists and political leaders.

Despite periods of relative tolerance and tranquility, Jewish girls experience Antisemitism or microaggressions in many aspects of their lives, which suggests that this is an area of concern (Altman et al., 2016; Bakal et al., 2015).

Anti-Zionism: Anti-Zionism is defined as “prejudice against the Jewish movement for self-determination and the right of the Jewish people to a homeland in the [modern] State of Israel” (Anti-Defamation League, 2022a, para. 3). Jews and non-Jews can be anti-Zionist. For example, Satmar Jews (a Hasidic sect of Judaism) oppose Zionism since they believe that it will interfere with their messianic destiny (Magid, 2020). Other forms of anti-Zionism can occur when people deny Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish sovereignty (Anti-Defamation League, 2022a, para. 1). Some anti-Zionists maintain that Zionism promotes racism and nationalism by forcibly removing Palestinians from their homeland and forcing them to live in an apartheid state, particularly when Israel is a segregated country (Beinart, 2019; British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC], 2016).

Zionism: Zionism is the movement that believes in the establishment and development of a state for the Jewish people in their ancestral home of Israel. There are many variations within this movement. The concept of modern Zionism emerged in Eastern Europe during the mid-19th century amid mounting Antisemitism (Sarna, 2004). Theodor Herzl consolidated various streams of Zionist thinkers into a political movement to support the development of a Jewish state (Sarna, 2004). Modern-day Zionism is a “big tent” movement “that includes those across the spectrum from progressives, moderates and conservatives and those who are apolitical” (Anti-Defamation League, 2022b, para. 6). Many Jews came to support Zionism after the Holocaust, since they felt that Jews would only be safe if they had a homeland of their own (Antler, 2018).

Factions of Jews and non-Jews among the far-left oppose Zionism and see it as a “settler-colonial movement” where Jews have “more rights than others” (Jewish Voice for Peace, n.d., para. 4).

Progressive Zionism: Progressive Zionism seeks to advance a two-state solution and put an end to the occupation of the West Bank. It also advocates for religious and cultural pluralism, gender equity, full and equal rights for all members of the LGBTQ+ community, dignity for all refugee workers and asylum seekers, and social justice and democratic rights for all Israeli citizens (Ameinu, n.d.). Progressive Zionism maintains that people can be critical of Israel and Zionism while supporting Israel's existence.

Mizrahi: This term is used to describe Jews of Middle Eastern or North African descent, including those from Iran, Yemen, and Iraq, among others (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.; Sarna, 2004). Prior to the twentieth century, approximately 1.5 million Mizrahi Jews lived in North Africa and/or the Middle East (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.). Mizrahi Jews have their own foods, customs, and traditions. Many Mizrahi Jews were forced to flee their countries of origin due to religious persecution and intolerance. Today, many Mizrahi Jews live in Israel, Canada, or the United States.

Sephardic: Sephardic Jews originate from the Iberian Peninsula and Spain. Many Sephardic Jews were forced to relocate after the Spanish Inquisition, whereupon they spread to various continents and countries while maintaining their own customs and traditions (Gerber, 1994; Sarna, 2004). Ladino was once a common language spoken among them. Jewish Argentinian scholar Bitton notes, "I grew up in a home where Sepharadi life was understood as offering an alternative narrative of what it means to be Jewish in the world and specifically in America" (as cited in Brawarski, 2016, para. 2), in reference to her alienation from dominant Jewish American discourse.

Identity: Identity represents how an individual understands themselves in relation to others. People have multiple identities that are based on shared values and common historical, racial, ethnic, and cultural characteristics (Buckingham, 2008). Identity reifies a person's uniqueness and their belongingness with others (Buckingham, 2008). Scholars posit that individuals perform different selves across different social contexts (see Gergen, 1991; Goffman, 1959; Harter et al., 1997; Lifton, 1993). Thus, a person's self-definition varies according to time, place, and context. Hall (1990) describes identity as a performative process that is shaped by external influences; it is "always constituted within, not outside, representation" (p. 222). Jenkins (2008) suggests that identity is a fluid concept and that a person is always involved in a process of "becoming," and that identity is never complete. Adolescence marks a formative time in the identity development process (Erikson, 1968). Harter et al. (1997) note that it is common, but not ideal, for the developing adolescent to experience contradictions since they are figuring out who they are and who they want to be in various aspects of their lives.

Feminism: A movement and framework that aims to recognize the full political, bodily, religious, and economical autonomy of individuals who identify as girls and women. The American feminist movement is anchored in the political and historical struggles of women dating back to the nineteenth century (Dicker, 2008). The identity of the movement, the causes it stands for, and whose experiences are represented have changed over time due to increased understanding of the ways that class, gender, and sexual identity impact women's and girls' lives.

Racial Identity Development: Racial identity development describes how a person thinks or feels about their race. A person's experience depends on their race, their social environment, and the messages that they receive from the dominant society about their race (Tatum, 2000). Racial identity development, or awareness of one's race, typically begins in childhood for people of color. While the prescribed stages offer a framework for how a person can experience racial identity development, each person moves through the stages at a different pace.

Black Racial Identity Development: William Cross's (1991, 1995) five-stage model describes how people of color move toward nigrescence, a healthy black identity. It is a circular rather than a linear process (Tatum, 1997). Cross proposes that racial identity development begins during adolescence and continues through adulthood. People can stay in particular stages or move from one to another as they encounter new experiences with racism. In the *pre-encounter* stage, a person absorbs values and beliefs from the dominant culture. In the *encounter* stage, a person gains awareness of their marginalization and what it means to be a member of an oppressed group. In the next phase, *immersion/emersion*, an individual looks for opportunities to explore their history and culture, typically with peers from their racial group. During *internalization*, the individual begins to feel secure with their racial identity. They are able to establish relationships with people outside their racial group who respect their racial identity. The final stage, *Internalization-commitment* occurs when an individual uses their racial identity to benefit members of their racial group and members of other marginalized groups over a sustained period of time.

White Racial Identity Development: Different theories have been developed to examine how White people come to think about their racial identity. Janet E. Helms' (1995) model, which focuses on how Black and White people develop racial consciousness, was among the first to examine racial identity development in White people. Her five-stage model focuses on racial identity development in both White and Black people. While the goal for White people is to move from being racist to being anti-racist, the goal for Black people is to develop a positive racial identity (Leach et al., 2002).

The stages included in her model for White people include phase one: *Contact,* where the individual is "colorblind" to racism. *Disintegration* occurs when these assumptions are challenged. If a person is unable to grow from this experience, they move into *Reintegration*, which is marked by an intensive display of White superiority and defensiveness. A person who is able to work through these challenges moves into phase two: *Pseudo-independence* is the first stage of positive racial identification. A person in this stage will look to people of color to confront and explain racism to them. *Immersion/emersion* occurs when a person is able to connect their White identity with an anti-racist identity. They reach the last stage, *Autonomy,* when they feel committed to pursuing an anti-racist agenda as a White person.

Rowe et al.'s (1994) White Racial Consciousness Model differs from Helms' (1995) in that it focuses on people's attitudes about Whiteness rather than a critique of people who are *not* White. They posit that people's attitudes change based on their experiences, rather than according to a developmental trajectory. It features seven attitudes, which are classified as "achieved," when a White person has explored their racial identity and/or made a commitment to explore their feelings about race, and "unachieved," when a person refuses to explore their racial identity and their feelings about race. The attitudes that fall into the unachieved category include the following: 1) *Dependent*: individuals are aware of their Whiteness but fail to see themselves as part of the majority. 2) *Dissonant*: individuals are aware that they are White, but they have not explored this identity in depth. 3) *Avoidant*: individuals fail to acknowledge the impact of racism on society.

Four attitudes are included in the achieved status. These include: 4) *Conflictive*: Individuals believe in equality for all races but are unwilling to make concessions, such as giving up their comfort or power, to make this possible. 5) *Dominative*: Individuals have thought about their Whiteness and where they stand in regard to people from other racial groups. They believe that they are superior and exhibit pro-White and ethnocentric attitudes. 6) *Integrative*:

individuals understand the complexities of race and how racism undergirds society. They also have a clear understanding of their White identity. 7) *Reactive*: Individuals are aware of their White racial identity and the benefits afforded to them by White privilege. They strongly identify with minority groups and their issues.

Latino Racial Identity Development: Ferdman and Gallegos' (2001) model of Latino identity development describes the racial identity development process experienced by Hispanics and Latinos in the United States. In a subsequent article about their model, the authors note that "the concept of race is particularly challenging when applied to Latinos in the United States, who, according to the U. S. Census, "can be of any race'" (2007, p. 30). This is compounded by the fact that Latino is an ethnic category, rather than a racial category. Some Latinos are light-skinned, and others are dark; some speak English as their first language, while others speak Spanish, Portuguese, or a different language as their primary language. Latinos also represent many different nationalities, cultures, and religions. Their model is designed to accommodate their different experiences.

Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) do not see racial identity development in Latinos as occurring along a linear trajectory. Rather, they assert that individuals' feelings about racial identity can change over time. Some people can stay within a particular orientation during their entire lives. The orientations are as follows: 1) *Undifferentiated*: A person in this position is relatively closed to exploring their racial identity; they exhibit a "colorblind" ideology. 2) *White-identified*: a person identifies as racially White and feels superior to people of color. 3) *Latino as "Other" Orientation*: a person sees themselves as non-White but lacks a cohesive sense of their Latinx identity. 4) *Sub-group Identified Orientation*: a person identifies with their cultural group, but they do not identify as being Latinx. 5) *Latino-identified Orientation*: A person identifies with their Latinx identity and with other Latinx people. They are open to people from other races and cultures. 6): *Latino-integrated Orientation*: A person sees their Latinx identity as an integrated part of their identity. They are able to see the complexity of other people's identities and to challenge racism and inequality for themselves and others.

Asian American and Pacific Islander Racial Identity Development: Similar to Latinx and Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders also encompass several identity groups, each with its own language, culture, and religion. Therefore, they may identify with their specific ethnic group but not within the larger context of Asian Americans. Two models commonly used to describe identity development in Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders include Kim's (2001) Asian American Identity Development (AAID) Model and Accapadi's (2012) Asian American Identity Consciousness Model. Kim's (2001) model is based on five stages that occur on a linear trajectory. These include: *Ethnic awareness*, where the family provides a neutral base for a child to develop their initial feelings about their ethnicity; *White identification*: where children internalize negative thoughts and feelings about being Asian from their White peers; *Awakening to Social-Political Consciousness*: where a person understands what it means to be a member of an oppressed group and feels connected with this identity; *Redirection*: when a person feels connected to their Asian culture and identity and can also feel anger toward White people for the oppression people from their ethnic group face. The final stage, *Incorporation*: occurs when a person feels comfortable with their ethnic identity and with the ethnic identity of other people. They no longer resent White people.

Accapadi's (2012) model views identity development as a fluid process that can change over time. The model identifies six entry points for individuals, which can vary in relevance according to the individual. These include: 1) *Ethnic attachment*: speaks to the degree to which a person’s ethnicity informs their identity. 2) *Familial influence*: refers to the influence that a person’s family has on their racial consciousness. 3) *Immigration history*: accounts for the diverse histories among Asian Americans in the United States and the impact on their identity. 4) *External influences and perceptions*: accounts for how systems of power and oppression factor into the experiences of Asian Americans and their perceptions of their identity. 5) Self as other: accounts for the “otherness” Asian Americans experience based on their appearance and how this factors into their racial consciousness. 6) *Other social identities*: includes other social factors that impact the identity experiences of Asian Americans, such as class, gender identity, sexual orientation, and religion.

Racism: Racism is a social construct developed by White people to uphold their belief in White superiority (DiAngelo, 2016). Throughout history, White people have developed laws, systems, and policies to support racism and maintain a system of control over non-White people (Tatum, 1997). Robin DiAngelo (2016) describes racism as “a form of oppression in which one racial group dominates others” (p. 107). She further claims that “in the United States, Whites are the dominant group and people of color are the minoritized group” (p. 107). Tatum (1997) notes that racism systematically impacts people’s lives: “...it is a *system* involving cultural messages and institutional policies and practices as well as the beliefs of individuals. In the United States, it works to privilege Whites and to the disadvantage of people of color” (p. 7). Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and Native American people have different historical experiences, and they experience racism and privilege in different ways.

Ethnic Identity Development: Ethnic identity describes the sense of belonging or identification a person feels to their heritage and/or cultural group (Phinney, 1992). Ethnic identity is fluid and can change over time and according to context (Phinney, 2003). Adolescents with strong ethnic identities tend to have higher self-esteem than those who lack a sense of connection to their ethnic group (Phinney, 1993, 2003). Individuals typically experience a shift in their ethnic identity during adolescence (Phinney, 1993). This is when they become aware of their minority status and begin to explore what it means to them. Umaña-Taylor et al. (2014) use the term *ethnic-racial identity* (ERI) to describe “the beliefs and attitudes that individuals have about their ethnic–racial group memberships, as well as the processes by which these beliefs and attitudes develop over time” (p. 23).

Phinney (1993) has outlined the process of ethnic identity development in adolescents. In the *unexamined* stage, individuals are unaware of their ethnic identity. *Identity search/moratorium* occurs when/if a person experiences a situation that requires them to think about their relationship to their ethnic identity. *Ethnic identity achievement* occurs when or if a person internalizes and embraces their ethnic identity. According to Phinney (1993), individuals can only achieve a positive ethnic identity if they have thoroughly explored their identity and determined what it means to them.

While this model is grounded in the experiences of adolescents and emerging adults of color, it is also relevant for examining the experiences of Jews who are White since research indicates that they maintain the strongest ethnic identity of all White groups in America (see Weisskirch et al., 2016). Outside of Orthodoxy, Jewish girls are also noted to maintain higher levels of ethnic identity than boys (see Davey et al., 2001; Markstrom et al., 1998). This can be attributed to gendered patterns of socialization (Davey et al., 2003; Fishman, 2000; Markstrom et al., 1998). At the same time, Jewish identity confounds researchers because, unlike other ethnic identity groups, they are a racially privileged but religiously marginalized group (MacDonald-

Dennis, 2005). However, it is more complicated because they are also a cultural/ethnic group, and because White supremacists do not view Jews as White.

Several factors can influence how an adolescent feels about their ethnic identity, including how their ethnic group is perceived by the dominant culture, whether they have access to a peer group with whom to examine and celebrate their identity, and exposure to adults who can expose them to the values, attitudes, and behaviors of their ethnic group (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Moreover, discrimination is commonly experienced among members of minority ethnic groups (Phinney, 1989). How a person responds to discrimination and the extent to which they are exposed to it can determine how they feel about their ethnic identity. People may reject their social group or attempt to change the way it is perceived by dominant society (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As noted above, while positive ethnic identity is correlated with high self-esteem, individuals from historically oppressed and/or marginalized groups may internalize dominant beliefs about their ethnic group, which can result in depression and self-loathing (Phinney, 1989; Smith & Silva, 2011). These experiences can either strengthen or weaken a young person's sense of ethnic identity (Branscombe et al., 1999; Brugger, 2021; Gonzales-Backen et al., 2018).

For Jews, this can result in what Gilman (1986) refers to as the internalization of negative stereotypes, where one becomes a "self-hating" Jew, or where they come to accept their otherness and associate it with negative feelings. Gilman (1986) notes, "Jews react to the world by altering their sense of identity, what they wish themselves to be, so they become what the group labeling them as Other had determined them to be" (p. 12).

Faith Development: James W. Fowler's (1981, 1991) model of faith development is commonly used to examine the process of faith development in individuals. Fowler (1981) defines faith as:

> …a person's or group's way of moving into the force field of life. It is our way of finding

> coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives. Faith is a person's way of seeing him or herself in relation to others against a background of shared meaning and purpose. (p. 4)

His model consists of six successive stages, which are influenced by Erikson's theory of ego development and Piaget's theory of cognitive development, and four of which take place during childhood and adolescence. Fowler referred to these as stages of faith consciousness. An individual moves from one to the next when they become aware of the limitations of the current stage they are in. The transition from one stage to the next can be triggered by an emotional event, such as the death of a family member, or a change in one's life status. The stages include:

Primal faith (infancy to 2 years of age): This stage provides the foundation for faith development. It begins when an infant learns to overcome separation anxiety through the safe and trusting relationships they build with parents and caregivers. Stage 1, Intuitive-Predictive (age 3-7 years): Children learn about religion and God by hearing stories and participating in rituals that are modeled by others. They perceive God as a magical figure who is larger than life. Stage 2, Mythic-Literal Faith (ages 6-12): Children are able to engage in logical thought, which can lead them to question the stories and beliefs behind their religious faith. They begin to understand that people have different religious beliefs than they do. Stage 3, Synthetic-Conventional Faith (Ages 13-18): Fowler notes that some people stay at this stage for their entire lives. This stage typically begins during early adolescence, when teens are able to engage in abstract thought. They are eager to meet the expectations of their religious institutions. The desire for interpersonal relationships also correlates with a desire for a close personal relationship with God. A person who is able to form a strong synthetic-conventional faith is able to commit to "a set of beliefs, values, and commitments that provides orientation and courage for living" (Fowler, 1991, p. 38). Fowler cautions that "a culture is in deep jeopardy when it no longer can provide encounters for young people with persons and communities who can satisfy the need for role models committed to lives of truth" (1991, p. 38).

Individuals can remain in stage three or move on to Stage Four, Individuative-Reflective Faith. Two important events must occur for a person to reach this stage. They must first affirm their religious faith and beliefs and claim an "executive ego," which involves being accountable for one's personal life and experience (Fowler, 1981). Stage Five, Conjunctive Faith: People typically enter this stage at midlife or older. It involves embracing polarities and opposites, including the idea that people are both masculine and feminine and that they possess both benevolent and destructive qualities. This can lead people to gain a deeper appreciation for their religious faith and the beliefs of others. Stage Six, Universalizing Faith: Fowler notes that few people reach this stage. At this stage, a person sees things from the perspective of God and acts on behalf of God. They are committed to spreading justice and love; "they live as though a commonwealth of love and justice were already reality among us" (Fowler, 1991, p. 41). Unfortunately, people who reach this stage put their lives at risk by standing up to injustice.

Shire (1987) has critiqued the applicability of Fowler's model for Jews. He claims that Jewish faith development is an iterative process. Part of this is due to the fact that Jews are by nature considered *B'nai Yisrael*, people who wrestle with God. Shire (1987) notes that:

> …At times it may be deep enough to adhere in all our heart, in all our soul, and all our might to a loving God; but at other times, we might lose sight of a relationship, and doubt it's ever existed. Both of these moments comprise our searching. (p. 25)

Shire (1987) further notes that each successive stage in Fowler's model moves a person closer to an individual relationship with God rather than with their community, which runs counter to Jewish people's covenantal relationship with God. He concludes that "the importance of Fowler's work for Jewish education lies in understanding our relationship to God as being a changing and developing one" (p. 25).

Religious Identity: Religious identity explains the value a person places on being part of a religious group and the emphasis they place on the values, rituals, and traditions associated with their religion. Durkheim (1912/1955) described religion as both a group and an individual identity, since it constitutes an individual's beliefs and the sense of community they derive from others. According to this framework, a person develops a positive sense of religious identity when they discover aspects of a religious "in-group" that set it apart from other "out-groups" (Greenfield & Marks, 2007; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). However, religious identity is complicated, and it can change over time. Curtis and Olson (2019) note that while *religious identity* is well understood, religious identification— how people make meaning of their religious identities— remains elusive. In their study of individuals from Germany, Poland, and the United Kingdom, they examined the *importance* (religion as an independent variable) and *prominence* (how religion compared to other identities) of religious identification among participants. They found discrepancies between the way that people described their religious affiliation and the role that religion held in their lives, suggesting the need to consider religious identification as an important dimension in social psychological research.

Anti-racism: Anti-racism consists of actions and behaviors taken on behalf of individuals to eliminate racism at all levels of society (Kendi, 2019). It requires awareness of one's own racial identity and a willingness to accept responsibility for the role they play in upholding White supremacy.

Critical Consciousness: A framework for understanding how oppressed or marginalized people learn to critically analyze and act to change their social conditions. It involves taking action against oppressive conditions in one's life in the interest of justice (see Freire, 1970). The concept has been further developed within feminist and girl-centered contexts to respond to the oppression and marginalization experienced by girls and women (Asher, 2007; Clonan-Roy et al., 2016). Watts et al. (2011) propose that there are three aspects to critical consciousness. These include critical reflection, a rejection of social inequities; political efficacy, a perceived ability to effect social change; and critical action, an individual or collective action to elicit social change.

Social Justice Work: Bell (2016) claims that "the goal of social justice is full and equitable participation of people from all social identity groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs" (p. 1). Social justice work encompasses many different categories. Dorff and Ruttenberg (2010) describe social justice work as an imperative to help those in need. They note that there are several ways to take action; some of which include philanthropy, organizing or participating in community service projects, letter-writing campaigns, policy change, or voting.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced my research topic, explained my positionality, and shared my approach for working with and understanding Jewish adolescent activist girls' lives. I explained why it is critical to address how Jewish activist girls are navigating issues around voice, visibility, and representation in today's sociopolitical climate. I explained why it is important to reach beyond White, middle-class populations when conducting research on Jewish girls' lives and how I will plan to include girls from more diverse backgrounds in my study. I also shared key definitions and phrases that will inform my study. In the next chapter, Chapter Two, I provide a review of the essential literature, which draws from girls' developmental psychology, girls' studies, and research on Jewish girls, all of which informed my understanding of how Jewish girls' experiences are understood and where the deficits lie.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview of the seminal literature on Jewish girls. It explains where their identities are made visible and where they are not, and what this says about them. It is informed by the literature on girls' development and girls' studies, which investigate aspects of girls' lives and the conditions in which they live. While Jewish girls have all but remained absent from this discourse, it has undoubtedly influenced research about them, as they have been interpreted through similar problematizing, victimizing, and strength-based frameworks (see Benjamin & Gordon, 2008; Clark, 2000; Fader, 2009; Levine, 2003; Philips, 1997; Pinhas et al., 2008). The next section highlights dominant approaches that are used to examine Jewish girls' experiences. This includes ethnographies about Hasidic girls; deficit-based research that focuses on eating disorders; feminist-based research that centers Jewish girls' voices; girl-centered research that investigates issues that are unique to Jewish girls; and research conducted by Jewish institutions that examines how Jewish girls derive meaning from their Jewish identity. This frames the context in which Jewish girls' lives are understood and highlights the gaps in the literature.

This review of literature provides an important context for situating the research questions:

RQ1: How do Jewish activist girls navigate their relationship to voice, visibility, and representation?

RQ2: What are the unique challenges experienced by Jewish girl activists?

RQ3: How do Jewish girl activists exercise resistance against the challenges they experience?

Section I: Adolescent Girls' Development

During the past century, various theories have sought to explain how adolescents, and more recently, girls, come to know themselves and understand their place in the world. Erikson (1968) theorized that the primary task of adolescence is to develop an independent sense of self. He viewed identity development as a linear process and posited that adolescents who successfully resolved this "crisis" could move onto fidelity, the sixth of eight life stages that were essential to manhood.[27] While Erikson's theory continues to hold significant weight in the literature on adolescent development, it has also been critiqued for its narrow focus on White middle-class boys and its limited applications to other identity groups, among them girls, individuals who are not White, heterosexual, and/or middle-class (see Gilligan, 1982; 1990; Sneed et al., 2006).

The subsequent literature shows that girls develop through relational contexts and the support they derive from others (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Jordan, 2005; Miller, 1987; Sullivan, 1996; Taylor et al., 2007). A social constructivist perspective further maintains that girls' development is socially and culturally determined (Vygotsky, 1978). Their developmental trajectories vary due to the intersections of race, class, gender, sexual identity, and religion, all of which have a fundamental impact on their identity development. These factors influence the opportunities that are made available to them and how they are perceived by others (Forber-Pratt et al., 2021; Gilligan, 1982; 1990; Lopez et al., 2011; Phinney, 1993). Girls who are White and middle-class tend to be viewed through a lens of youthfulness and innocence that is often denied to girls of color (Bailey et al., 2017; Odoms-Young & Bruce, 2018). However, there is a great amount of economic diversity among White girls, as there is among girls of all other races and ethnic groups, which influences their access to social and cultural capital. Girls who are raised in middle-class and/or upper middle-class communities receive disproportionate access to nutritious foods, high-performing schools, fresh air and green space, quality health care, and enrichment activities, all of which are conditions for optimal development (Bettie, 2014, 2016; Newachek et al., 2003).

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[27] Marcia (1994) operationalized this theory by assigning four statuses to explain where a person was in their identity development. These were *diffuse*, where an identity had not been explored; *foreclosed*, where a commitment had been made with limited exploration; *moratorium,* where an identity had been actively explored but a commitment had not been made; and *achieved*, where an identity had been actively explored and a commitment had been made.

While the Black middle class has grown, girls of color are often subjected to structural racism and are raised in communities that are riddled with poverty, underperforming schools, and violence due to systemic racism (Kochhar & Sechopoulos, 2022; Morris, 2016; Newachek et al., 2003). This can pose challenges that can threaten their healthy development. Messages about White middle-class girls' innocence and girls of colors' dangerousness are reinforced through their interactions and exchanges with social institutions including family, culture, religion, medicine, the media, politics, and the legal system.

Adolescence

Adolescence marks a significant period of physical, emotional, psychosocial, and cognitive change in a girl's life (Piran & Ross, 2005). The meanings attached to it are socially, culturally, and religiously determined (Lesko, 2002; Piran & Ross, 2005). Some girls are members of cultures and/or religions that mark their passage into adolescence through rituals, celebrations, or ceremonies where they are entrusted with new roles, responsibilities, and/or freedoms (Lincoln, 1991; Mahdi et al., 1987; Markstrom & Iborra, 2003). Understandings of when adolescence begins and ends have changed over time due to the forces of industrialization and earlier pubertal development in girls (Herman-Giddens et al., 1997; Piran & Ross, 2005; Sawyer et al., 2018). Adolescence is now considered to last from ages 10 to 19 (World Health Organization, n.d.).

A few deficits are noted in the literature on adolescent girls' development. To begin with, it largely focuses on White middle-class girls and excludes the experiences of other girls (Clonan-Roy et al., 2006; Piran & Ross, 2005). Also, girls are rarely centered in research about them (Mazzarella, 2010a). In addition, most of the discourse examines adolescence through a problematizing lens rather than as a positive shift in girls' development.

Goals of Adolescence. The primary goals of adolescence are to develop an independent sense of self and to build meaningful relationships with individuals outside the family unit (Flynn, 2018; Piran & Ross, 2005; Spencer, 1999). Adolescence represents a time of tremendous physical and cognitive growth, as the body reaches a stage of physical maturation and girls' thinking grows from concrete to abstract (Piran & Ross, 2005). Puberty is divided into three stages: early adolescence (10–13 years) when breast growth typically begins and menstruation starts; middle adolescence (14–17 years) when signs of abstract thinking begin to develop; and late adolescence (17–19 years) when girls begin to assume responsibility for themselves (Allen & Waterman, 2019). During this time, their focus shifts from the family to their peer group (Piran & Ross, 2005).

Friendship. Friends play an important role in promoting healthy social and emotional development in girls. They can help to build pro-social skills such as trust, intimacy, and attachment and provide girls with assistance when it comes to decision-making and problem solving (Berndt, 2004; Sears & McAfee, 2017). Girls who have stable friendships are noted to suffer from fewer depressive symptoms and to maintain higher rates of academic achievement (Vitaro et al., 2009). They are also less likely to engage in risky behaviors. These benefits are noted to last throughout the life course (Van Harmelen et al., 2017).

Religion. At this stage, it is common for adolescent girls to question their religious beliefs and practices (see Fowler, 1981, 1991; Markstrom, 1999; Shire, 1987, 1997, 2013). This corresponds with the fact that many adolescents experience autonomy over decisions such as whether to attend religious school and services, practices that are typically determined by their families when they are younger (Markstrom, 1999). They are also exposed to the belief systems of others, which can lead them to question the values and traditions they were raised with. The literature shows that ethnic identity and religious identity are highly interrelated and that adolescents from marginalized groups can derive a sense of community, values, and support from their religious faith and from participating in faith-based communities (Harker, 2001; Hirschman, 2004; Lopez et al., 2011).

In their study of high school-age students with Latin American, Asian, and European heritage, Lopez et al. (2011) found that Latin American (46%) and Asian participants (43%) expressed higher rates of religious identity than European participants (11%), with girls of European heritage reporting higher levels than boys. They also found that adolescents' participation in religious communities declined during this time, which they attributed to the fact that many adolescents make their own decisions about their religious beliefs and practices, are navigating competing interests such as extracurricular activities and are figuring out their religious beliefs. However, girls' religious participation consistently outpaces boys'.

Early Puberty

Several factors can influence when a girl begins puberty, including hormonal factors, low birthweight, whether she has access to nutritious foods, or conversely, if she is overweight, as well as her race and/or ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and the environmental conditions in which she is raised (Belsky, 2007; Herman-Giddens, 1997; Karapanou & Papadimitriou, 2010). Black girls and Hispanic girls tend to experience the onset of puberty at least six months earlier than White girls (Herman-Giddens, 1997; Martinez, 2020). A great deal of discourse has emerged from medical professionals, public health researchers, psychologists, and the media about the optimal age for pubertal timing in girls and the consequences to their health, psychosocial development, and emotional wellbeing if puberty occurs outside of the expected age range (see Handwerk 2014; Herman-Giddens, 1997; Kelly at al., 2017).[28][29] While many of these concerns are well-founded, they are grounded in a narrative that problematizes girls and pathologizes their early development.

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[28] A widely referenced study conducted by Marcia Herman-Giddens (1997) with 17,000 adolescent girls confirmed that puberty began in girls earlier than the medical literature indicated. For White girls, breast development began at 9.9 years of age and menstruation at 12.88 years of age. For Black girls breast development began at 8.8 years of age and menstruation at 12.16 years of age. Herman-Giddens concluded that girls were entering puberty a year earlier than the medical literature indicated (see Marshall & Tanner, 1968).

[29] For example, girls who experience early or "precocious puberty" are at increased risk for obesity, type 2 diabetes, breast cancer, reproductive tract cancers, cardiovascular disease, and skeletal problems, as well as a host of

Problematization of Early Puberty. Some of the purported risks among girls who experience early puberty include an increased proclivity for drug use, school absenteeism, eating disorders, depressive disorders, and a younger age of sexual debut (Graber, 2013; Greenspan & Deardorff, 2014). According to Mazzarella (2010a), this is reflective of “a larger and ongoing moral panic about (girls) growing up too fast” (p. 51). This “moral panic” is underscored in the CDC’s report, *Trends and Patterns in Menarche in the United States: 1995 through 2013–2017*, which indicates that “girls who experience menarche at younger ages may appear older, have older friends, and be more likely to engage in negative behaviors such as missing school, smoking, and drinking” (Martinez, 2020, p. 1). While this report and others (see Hoyt et al., 2020) highlight important concerns that can imperil girls’ health, they fail to interrogate how living in a culture where girls’ bodies are sexualized and objectified contributes to their engagement in risky behaviors and impacts their sense of self, as noted by Lamb & Brown (2006) and Roberts & Zurbriggen (2013).[30]

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psychosocial issues including eating disorders, body image disorder, depression, earlier initiation of sexual activity, and victimization of sexual abuse (Golub et al., 2008; Kelly et al., 2017; Martinez, 2020).

[30] Moreover, girls are rarely centered in these discussions about their health and bodies. In her content analysis of how newspaper journalists wrote about early puberty over the course of 25 years (1982-2007), Mazzarella (2010a) found that “although girls were the focus of more than three-fourths of these articles, they were rarely if ever heard speaking for themselves… As a result, the reader has no hint of what the experience of early puberty is *really* like for girls” (pp. 44-53). The discourse was driven by adults who feared that girls were losing their innocence at ever earlier ages. Rather than viewing early puberty as a normal occurrence in girls’ development,

The "Thin Ideal"

The prevailing literature suggests that many adolescent girls experience difficult psychosocial adjustment due to feelings of discomfort in their bodies (Bucchianeri et al., 2016; Piran & Ross, 2005). Conflicting reports indicate whether girls of color are better able to navigate these challenges (Bucchianeri et al., 2016; Piran & Ross, 2005; Townsend et al., 2010). This has been attributed to pressure to achieve the "thin ideal" or other culturally prescribed body types such as "thickness" that are advocated by the media but unattainable for most people (Burk, 2015; Mahon & Hevey, 2021; Rodgers, 2016; Rosario et al., 2021). The 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) revealed worrying concerns among girls of all races, ethnicities, and sexual orientations about their weight and body size.[31] More than 50% of girls shared that they "were dieting or trying to lose weight" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2019b). This suggests that a significant number of girls are dissatisfied with their bodies.

Body Image Disorders/Eating Disorders

In extreme cases, girls can develop a body image disorder or an eating disorder. These mental health conditions can become lifelong struggles for girls. If left untreated,

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girls were written about as though their bodies had somehow failed them. One headline read, "Early puberty linked to problems in girls" (Squires, 1997), while another mourned the loss of girls' innocence in "Precious years are lost with early puberty" (Johnson, 1997). This reflects how representations of girls' experiences are constructed by adults rather than by girls themselves.

[31] The YRBS is a national survey that is conducted annually among a representative sample of middle- and high-schoolers. It measures six categories of health-related behaviors that can cause death and disability on topics including sexual behavior, tobacco use, physical exercise, diet, alcohol, and drug abuse.

they can result in serious harm or death (Hosseini & Padhy, 2021; Jones, 2004; Stice, 2002; Tiggemann, 2005). Several theoretical frameworks exist to explain the etiology of these conditions. The Tripartite Influence Model posits that parents, peers, and the media contribute to negative body image in girls by reinforcing society's restrictive standards (Thompson et al., 1999). Girls internalize these ideals by comparing themselves to others. Fredrickson and Roberts' (1997) objectification theory maintains that girls develop in a context where they are treated as sexual objects and they learn to participate in their own self-objectification. As noted by Roberts (2013), girls "adopt a third-person perspective on the physical self, [which] is manifested by a chronic attention to the body's outward appearance" (p. 29).

Estimates show that between 0.3-0.4% of girls in the United States suffer from anorexia and 1% suffer from bulimia at any given time (Favaro et al, 2009; Keski-Rahkonen et al., 2007). These conditions often exist in tandem with other co-occurring disorders such as anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and depression (National Eating Disorders Association, n.d.). During the COVID-19 pandemic, rates of emergency room visits for eating disorders skyrocketed among adolescent girls due to a lack of routine, reduced access to mental health care, higher levels of anxiety caused by food insecurity, loneliness, increased caretaking responsibilities, and the loss of loved ones (Radhakrishnan et al., 2022).[32]

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[32] The CDC tracked this data by recording the number of emergency room visits among children and teens and the reasons for their visits. The number of emergency visits among adolescents aged 12 to 17 increased by 31% between March and October 2020, compared to 2019. Female adolescents in this age group accounted for the largest increase in visits. In 2020, weekly visits increased among girls ages 12–17 for eating and tic disorders, a sign of

Social Media

While many girls are able to successfully navigate these challenges, they must also contend with the widespread influence of the media, which objectifies girls and women through derogatory, racist, and sexualized images (Lamb & Brown, 2006; Zurbriggen & Roberts, 2013). Whereas previous iterations of girls' studies scholarship focused on providing girls with tools to resist sexual objectification in movies, television, and print media, contemporary scholars now work with girls to understand how they navigate identity and assert their agency in online spaces (see Keller, 2015, 2016, 2019; McArthur, 2016; Retallack et al., 2016). Moreover, while social media can provide girls with an important platform to access knowledge, develop relationships, and explore aspects of their identities, mental health professionals, scholars, and educators have raised concerns about the potential risks to girls, which include lowered self-esteem, unhealthy comparison to others, and increased rates of anxiety and depression (Choukas-Bradley et al., 2019; Coyne et al., 2021; Grisso & Weiss, 2005; Retallack et al., 2016; Subramanian, 2020; Stokes, 2007; Trammel & Dillihunt, 2012).[33] Activist girls have also found ways to use social media to effect positive change, which I discuss in greater detail

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stress. In 2021 they increased for depression, eating and tic disorders, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and in January 2022, they increased for anxiety, eating and tic disorders, and OCD (Radhakrishnan et al., 2022). Race/ethnicity, class, and other identity categories are not mentioned in their analysis.

[33] An example of the negative impact of social media on girls' health has been related to the form of social media they use (Chua & Chang, 2016; Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). In 2021, Facebook, the parent company of Instagram, was discovered to have knowingly concealed research about the damaging effects of its platform on girls' emotional health, which resulted in several cases of suicide in the United States and the United Kingdom (Riley, 2021; Wells et al., 2021).

in the section on girls' activism.

Mental Health

Mental health is another issue that significantly impacts girls' lives. The 2019 YRBS revealed startling trends about the impact of sexual identity, gender identity, and race/ethnicity on girls' substance use behaviors and socioemotional health. These findings are supported by literature that underscores the disproportionate struggles experienced by girls who are LGBTQ+, poor, and non-White due to racism, poverty, and homophobia (see Cauffman et al., 2005; Leary, 2020; Palacios, 2016; Restrepo, 2019). Among the 47% of high school-age girls who felt sad or hopeless "almost every day for 2 or more weeks in a row," rates were highest among LGBTQ+ and minority girls (CDC, 2019b).[34] For example, gay/lesbian Latinx/Hispanic girls reported rates of 80.8%, gay/lesbian White girls reported rates of 75.4%, and bisexual multiple race girls reported rates of 75.2%. Another population that warranted concern was American Indian/Native Alaskan girls, many of whom live in extreme poverty and are surrounded by substance abuse (Park-Lee et al., 2018). Their rates of depression were 61.5%. The need for mental health care only intensified during COVID-19. Girls accounted for the largest increase in emergency room visits for crisis care, both in terms of frequency and number of diagnoses received (Radhakrishnan et al., 2022).

Girls' access to care is mediated by several variables, including their race, class, sexual identity, gender identity, and geographic location (Garland et al., 2005; Marsh, 2006). Despite the fact that many girls of color and girls who are poor are exposed to the compounding forces of stress, family instability, food insecurity, abuse, and discrimination, all of which can have a deleterious impact on their mental health, girls who are White and middle-class are at an advantage when it comes to seeking mental health care as help-seeking behaviors are generally accepted in middle-class communities and there is a wider availability of services (United States Department of Education, n.d.). Girls of color tend to be judged more harshly when they experience the same symptomatology as White girls, since their issues are believed to be behavioral rather than emotional in nature (Leary, 2020). As a result, they are often denied access to therapeutic care and punished for “acting out” (Jon-Ubabuco & Dimmitt Champion, 2019; Leary, 2020).[35] Asian girls are disproportionately underserved due to a fear of stigma within the community and a lack of culturally competent services (Hahm et al., 2020).

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[34] The survey asked participants to identify based on the following racial/ethnic categories: American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White, or Multiple race; and sexual/gender identity categories: Heterosexual, Gay or lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, lesbian, or bisexual, or Not Sure.

For all girls, pathologizing mental illness can impact their feelings about their diagnosis and condition (Wills et al., 2020). One study showed that girls who took antidepressants struggled with competing narratives of selfhood since they felt that they had to conceal aspects of themselves when they were on medication (Wills et al., 2020).

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[35] According to data collected from the 2016 National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH), 61% of Black non-Hispanic children and 51% of Hispanic children have experienced at least one adverse childhood event (ACE), ranging from abuse and neglect to living with an adult with a mental illness, compared to 40% of White non-Hispanic children and 23% of Asian non-Hispanic children (Sacks & Murphey, 2018).

Conversely, some critics argue that younger celebrities such as Britney Spears and Demi Lovato have popularized and commodified neoliberal versions of wellness through their own mental health journeys, giving girls the sense that they can improve their mental health if they want to (Fisher, 2011; Stewart et al., 2020). To a certain extent, their narratives and others' have provided girls with opportunities to discuss their mental health experiences through social media (Hendry, 2020).

Mental Health and Substance Abuse

Mental health and substance abuse are tightly linked disorders, and one can reinforce the other (Child Mind Institute, 2019; Conway et al., 2016). Estimates show that half of young people with mental health issues develop substance abuse disorders (Taskiran, 2022, as cited in Miller, 2022). A 2016 study of 10,123 adolescents ages 13–18 showed that rates of alcohol and drug abuse were two-thirds higher among those with pre-existing mental health conditions (Conway et al., 2016). That said, many girls experiment with drugs and alcohol without becoming addicted. In the 2019 YRBS, 14% of females reported having used illicit drugs such as cocaine, inhalants, heroin, methamphetamines, hallucinogens, or ecstasy. Highest rates of use were reported among multiple-race gay, lesbian, or bisexual girls (36.7%), and multiple-race bisexual girls (31.8%; CDC, 2019b).[36] However, teens were not asked about the frequency of their drug use or about the precipitating factors behind their drug use. Thirty-two percent of girls also shared that they had at least one alcoholic drink in the past thirty days. American Indian/Native Alaskan girls' alcohol consumption far exceeded that of other girls at 53.6%. These data points suggest that girls who are burdened by multiple layers of oppression are more likely to engage in substance abuse behaviors and indicate the need to investigate cultural factors that influence the conditions of their lives.

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[36] The CDC did not ask how frequently participants used these substances, so it is impossible to know if they used them just once or every day. The question was whether they used them within the last 30 days.

School

School, and the act of being schooled, wields significant influence on who girls are and the people they become. Over the past 30 years, educators and activists have sought to understand the ways in which girls are underserved and marginalized by school systems and how girls of color and/or in poverty suffer the direst consequences, creating a situation where they are ultimately "pushed out" of schools (Morris, 2016) (see American Association of University Women [AAUW], 1991, 1993, 2011; Morris, 2016; Orenstein, 1994; Ringrose, 2013; Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

The AAUW's (1991) landmark report, *Shortchanging Girls*, *Shortchanging America*, began the conversation by documenting how educators devoted more class time to boys in subjects like math and science to the detriment of girls.[37] Teachers praised boys who called out, while penalizing girls for similar behavior, creating a situation where they lost confidence in their academic abilities and suffered staggering losses to their academic performance between the middle and high school years. These findings were reinforced by a subsequent study by AAUW (1992), *How Schools Shortchange Girls: The AAUW Report: A Study of Major Findings on Girls and Education*, which identified how structural barriers, such as sexual harassment, uneven disciplinary measures, and limited support from teachers, threatened girls' safety and limited their chances for future success despite the equal protections guaranteed to them through

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[37] The researchers interviewed almost 3,000 students between the ages of nine and 15 from a range of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Title IX.[38] Girls of color were uniquely affected by this substandard treatment. They were more likely to be suspended, expelled, or held back a grade and tracked into low-performing classes, leading to higher dropout rates and a fast-growing school-to-prison pipeline population (AAUW, 1991; Morris, 2016; Wu, 2014). Middle-class girls were subjected to other challenges, among them pressure to "achieve" in a system that was not designed to support them (Simmons, 2009).

In the executive summary of the 1992 AAUW report, President Alice McKee, named religion, as well as poverty and racism, as important barriers that threatened girls' achievement. noted, "If we do not begin to discuss more openly the ways in which ascribed power—whether on the basis of race, sex, class, sexual orientation, or religion—affects individual lives, we cannot truly prepare our students for responsible citizenship" (p. 3). While this could have been an important opportunity to bring Judaism and other religions into the narrative, there was a lack of discussion regarding how these identities impacted girls' educational experiences.[39]

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[38] Title IX, passed in 1972 as part of the Education Amendments, prohibits educational institutions that receive federal funding from discriminating on the basis of sex.

[39] This is likely due to the fact that religion was not considered a variable for analysis. While the findings from this report gave rise to research initiatives and programs to enhance girls' academic achievement and create safer schools, Judaism and Jewishness remained absent from the conversation. In fact, the authors' inclusion of religion could have just been an impression rather than a data point. Some scholars, such as Glanville et al. (2008) and Horwitz (2021), argue that religious fidelity is correlated with stronger academic performance, including higher test scores, more time spent on homework, and fewer behavioral issues (see also Regnerus, 2000). Horwitz found this to be true among Catholic boys and working-class and poor youth. At the same time, she also suggests that one cannot assume that the same would be true for Jews. However, a 2008 study conducted by B'nai B'rith Youth showed that Jewish girls devoted more time to academic study than Jewish boys, though rates of academic achievement among both populations exceeded that of their non-Jewish peers. Other studies show that participation

In the literature that followed, Myra and David Sadker (1994) chronicled how America’s schools eroded girls’ self-esteem and forced them into a position of self-silencing. Peggy Orenstein (1994) confirmed that these findings held true regardless of girls’ race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background. She met with eighth-grade girls from two California-based schools, one that served White middle-class students and another that served Black, Latinx, and Asian working-class students. She found girls across the board faced gender-based discrimination through the “hidden curriculum” and the “unstated lessons that students learn [about their] place in the hierarchy of larger society" (Orenstein, 1994, p. 5). While girls felt a sense of allyship with certain adults, they felt that teachers diminished their intellectual curiosity and administrators downplayed their needs so that sexual harassment became a regular occurrence in their daily environments. Their feelings of powerlessness reverberated outside the classroom, where girls were made to feel that their thoughts and contributions did not matter.

Sexual Harassment

The AAUW began to examine the issue of sexual harassment more closely in *Hostile Hallways: The AAUW Survey on Sexual Harassment in America’s Schools* (AAUW, 1993) and *Hostile Hallways*: *Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment in School* (AAUW, 2011). The reports showed that while students were aware of sexual harassment policies in their schools, they considered it a normative part of school culture and something they had to live with.

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in religious life also benefits the educational outcomes of adolescents in rural communities and those who live in environments plagued with high rates of poverty (see Elder & Conger, 2000; Regnerus & Elder, 2003). Religious identification can also provide youth with access to social and cultural capital and access to similarly minded peers (Glanville et al., 2008; Horowitz, 2021; Regnerus, 2000). These social networks serve as mutually reinforcing networks for teens to build meaningful connections.

Moreover, girls who were Black, disabled, and/or LGBTQ+ experienced harsher and more persistent forms of physical and verbal harassment (AAUW, 2011; Fineran, 2002; Harris & Kruger, 2020; National Women's Law Center [NWLC], 2019).[40] They received fewer protections since they were viewed as hypersexual, unfeminine, and/or somehow responsible for this treatment (Adeniji, 2015; Angel et al., 2018; Epstein et al., 2017; Palacios, 2016; Wilmot et al., 2021).[41] With limited support from adults, girls felt that their only option was to change their own behavior; 10% of participants in the 1993 study reported that they changed their routes to and from school, and 9% stopped participating in school sports and activities, which left them and other victims at risk for depression, anxiety, PTSD, attachment issues, and diminished life satisfaction (Apell et al., 2019; Eöm et al., 2015).

Dress Codes

While many schools have policies in place to protect students from experiencing sexual harassment and/or assault, they can also sexualize and adultify girls through their efforts to protect them. One of the primary ways this occurs is through dress codes, which tend to reflect White-centered values and limit racial, cultural, and bodily expression among girls and other marginalized students. Martin and Brooks (2020) state that “the use of school dress codes teaches students which bodies matter and which do not” (p. 3). In many schools, girls are subjected to rules about how much skin they can reveal around their necklines, hemlines, and shoulders, while boys experience few limitations (Pomerantz, 2007; Raby, 2010). Some communities have banned leggings and yoga pants under the pretense that they are distracting others, which blames girls for their sexualization (Kendall, 2016). In some schools, girls of color face additional sanctions. They are prohibited from wearing braids, coils, weaves, extensions, and durags, which are culturally appropriate ways of styling their hair (Martin & Brooks, 2020; NWLC, 2018). In addition, girls of color and those who are physically developed are targeted more frequently than other girls for dress code violations (Angel et al., 2018). In all cases, it is made clear that girls’ bodies are the problem rather than other people’s ways of interpreting them.

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[40] While incidents appeared to be on the rise for boys (56% in 2011 versus 49% in 1993), girls across all racial and ethnic groups perceived higher rates of sexual harassment in their schools than boys; for example, 19% of Black girls, 16% of White girls, and 13% of Hispanic girls felt that there was "some but not a lot" of sexual harassment at their schools compared to 15% of Black boys, 14% of White boys, and 12% of Hispanic boys, which could indicate that girls were more attuned to what constituted these behaviors since they were more likely to be on the receiving end. In both 1993 and 2001, 8 out of 10 students claimed that they had experienced sexual harassment at some point during their time at school (AAUW, 2011).

[41] Repeated reports show that girls of color and LGBTQ girls are seen as responsible for their sexual harassment or they are not believed by school officials and/or law enforcement agencies (see Angel et al., 2018; Palacios, 2016; Wilmot et al., 2021).

Raby (2010) conducted focus groups with high school-age girls in Ontario. She found that while many girls were critical of their school dress codes, they felt that girls who violated them were “whorish” and “slutty.” This suggests that participants’ understandings of girlhood were mediated by broader discussions about how girls should look and act. This affected how they related to their own sense of power and that of other girls in their environment. In some cases, girls have taken matters into their own hands. They have organized petitions and protests to challenge restrictive dress codes in their schools. When an Evanston, Illinois school forbade girls from wearing leggings, a throng of girls wore them the next day in protest, which represented their shared sense of determination, community, and resistance (Hess, 2014).

Raby and Pomerantz (2016) note that “school cultures are not trans-historical… but are created by the contextualized stories that girls (and others) tell about what their school is like” (p. 70). Some critics assert that educational equity has been achieved since girls now outperform boys in key areas such as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math; Ringrose, 2013; Semuels, 2017; Wilson, 2007). Their college attendance and graduation rates also exceed those of boys (Semuels, 2017; Wilson, 2007). There is also a noticeable decrease in risk factors that were once believed to stand in the way of girls’ education; rates of teen pregnancy are down, as are rates of sexually transmitted infections, and girls are graduating high school at a higher rate than boys, leading many to believe that girls can succeed if they want to (CDC, 2019b; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Reeves et al., 2021; Ringrose, 2013).[42] However, this reflects a neoliberal perspective, which maintains that each person has the capacity to be responsible for themselves in a post-capitalist world and free market economy (Harris, 2004). While many girls’ studies scholars argue that girls are uniquely positioned as the prime neoliberal subjects given their ability to transform themselves (see Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2009; Ringrose, 2013), this perspective ignores the experiences of girls whose lives are constrained by the intersecting variables of poverty, sexism, racism, unstable housing, familial instability, and inadequate access to food— circumstances that are beyond their control (Boyd, 2016; Pomerantz et al., 2013; Raby & Pomerantz, 2016). Many low-income girls and girls of color also attend under-resourced schools where they lack basic school supplies and learn in overcrowded classrooms and unsafe buildings (AAUW, n.d.; Ricks, 2014).

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[42] According to the Brookings Institute, in 2018, 88% of girls graduated high school compared to 82% of boys. However, this only reveals part of the story, as there were further discrepancies when race was involved in the analysis. The graduation rate for Black students is 79% and 81% for Hispanic students. This analysis was based on data gathered from 37 states, and the authors emphasize the importance of looking at certain states to examine the impact of race and socioeconomic status on boys, particularly Hispanic and Black boys’ low educational achievement (Reeves et al., 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted learning for all students and had a disproportionate effect on students from marginalized backgrounds. Some students lacked appropriate learning spaces and/or technology to participate in online learning. Others had to shoulder family care-taking responsibilities or supplement lost family income, which meant time away from school (Dorn et al., 2021; Hough, 2021). The learning deficit is likely to have a detrimental effect on girls' lifetime earnings and opportunities for the future (Dorn et al., 2021).

Sexual Development

Sex and healthy sexual development are also important hallmarks of adolescence. The various messages girls receive about sex, what it means to be sexual, and who they should be sexual with come from family, religion, class, culture, educational sources, peers, and the media (Bleakley et al., 2009; Cooper et al., 2021; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Garcia, 2018; Kantor & Lindberg, 2020; Lipkin, 2009; Piran & Ross, 2005; Tolman, 2002). Some girls are raised in cultures and religions that advocate heteronormativity and abstinence until marriage (Keller, 2021; Lipkin, 2009). Many girls are also educated in contexts where they learn that sex is dangerous and that being sexually active can damage their health and their reputation. This can prevent them from gaining the information they need to safeguard themselves against sexually transmitted infections (STIs), early pregnancy, and healthy decision-making (Bay-Cheng et al., 2013). These settings emphasize fear rather than pleasure and intimacy (Bay-Cheng et al., 2011, 2013; Kinsler et al., 2019; Tolman, 2002). Content delivery of this nature is largely ineffective, as it can provoke shame, humiliation, and guilt in girls who are sexually active. According to the Guttmacher Institute (2019), the need for comprehensive sex education (CSE) is critical, as more than 50% of twelfth graders (57%) are sexually active.

The messages that girls receive about sex are also racially and culturally coded. Whereas White and socioeconomically privileged girls are encouraged to delay sexual activity to ensure their chances for future success, poor and non-White girls are routinely deemed as hypersexual, even if they are abstinent (Bay-Cheng et al, 2013; Burns & Torre, 2004; Epstein et al., 2017; Morris, 2016). While the goals of comprehensive sex education should be to help young people find pleasure in their bodies, discover intimacy, and learn how to keep themselves safe, girls of color, those with disabilities, and girls who are poor are typically left out of these frameworks (Bay-Cheng et al., 2013; Dogan et al., 2018; Kantor & Lindberg, 2020; Sydnor-Campbell, 2017). Without adequate education and support, girls of color and/or low-income tend to engage in sexual intercourse at younger ages.[43] They also have higher rates of teen pregnancy, and higher rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV than girls who are White (CDC, 2019b; Hill & Kearl, 2011; Laurencin et al., 2018).[44] The National Black

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[43] According to the 2019 YRBS, girls who engaged in sexual intercourse before age 13 are as follows: Black, 2.5%; White, 1.8%; multiple races, 2.3%; Asian, 0.5%; and Hispanic, 1.9%.

[44] Over the past decade, rates of teen pregnancy, HIV, STIs, and girls who are sexually active have been steadily decreasing (CDC, 2019a). The CDC (2019a) finds it useful to measure change across decades as a meaningful point of comparison. The percentage of girls who are sexually active decreased from 45.7% in 2009 to

Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda (2020) notes that "Black youth are disproportionately harmed by health disparities that occur as a result of lack of access to comprehensive sexual health education" (p. 1).

Rape and Sexual Assault

Rape and sexual assault— unwanted sexual touching, forcing a person to perform sexual acts against their will, and penetrating the person's body without their consent— are pervasive issues that negatively impact girls' lives.[45] The majority of acts are committed by people who are known to girls, including acquaintances (43.6%), current or former intimate partners (35.1%), family members (28.8%), authority figures (4.5%), and strangers (27.7%; CDC, 2012b). According to English and Kenney (2003), "between 40% and 60% of all rape victims are under the age of eighteen, and most are adolescents" (p. 2). Moreover, 82% of victims are female (Snyder, 2000). Data collected between 2010 and 2012 revealed that 7.1%, or 8.6 million women, experienced rape, stalking, and/or physical violence before they turned 18 years of age (CDC, 2012a).

Girls involved in the juvenile justice system are especially vulnerable to sexual and emotional abuse, with Black and American Indian girls being disproportionately

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37.6% in 2019. While these numbers are promising, contraceptive use also decreased. In 2009, the percentage of girls who used contraceptives during their last intercourse was 61.1%. The number dropped to 54.3% in 2019 (CDC, 2019a). Rates of STI testing are also concerning. Ninety percent of girls shared that they had never been tested for HIV, and 89.2% of females had not been tested for STIs other than HIV (CDC, 2019b). This is concerning considering the number of teenage girls who are sexually active and who are not using contraceptives.

[45] The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) defines sexual assault as "sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim" (RAINN, n.d., para. 2).

affected (National Center for Juvenile Justice, n.d.; Palacios, 2016).[46] Another population that warrants concern is girls of color who are in foster care. They are two times more likely to be sexually abused than White girls who are also in foster care, and they are at particular risk of being coerced into sexual trafficking (Banks & Kyckelhahn, 2011; Davey, 2020). LGBTQ+ girls are also a high-risk population. In the 2019 YRBS, 26.5% of bisexual girls reported that they experienced sexual violence in the form of kissing, touching, or forced intercourse, which far exceeded the average rate of 15% for all girls.[47] Rape and sexual abuse survivors report a host of negative effects on their health, including asthma, irritable bowel syndrome, frequent headaches, sleep disturbances, chronic pain, depression, anxiety, and attachment issues (CDC, 2012a).

Despite the pervasiveness of sexual assault and sexual violence in young women's lives, Greenberg and Barton (2017) note that "social structures and institutions routinely hand girls oppressive tasks of prioritizing, internalizing, and taking responsibility for young men's desires, educations, actions, and decisions above their own" (p. 9). This manifests itself in the form of victim-blaming, bureaucratic structures that make it difficult for survivors to bring their perpetrators to justice, and the fact that some bodies (White, cisgender, middle-class) are granted more believability than others by social service providers and authorities (Palacios, 2016; RAINN, n.d.). Girls and women of color are seen as unrapable and less deserving of justice, despite the fact that they are disproportionately affected (Banks, 2021; Davey, 2020). As a result, it is common for survivors to doubt the legitimacy of their experience, to feel that they are somehow at fault, or to fear retribution from their attacker (Palacios, 2016; The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, n.d.; RAINN, n.d.; Renold, 2018). While the #Metoo and #Timesup movements have helped to generate awareness and support for survivors, they have also led to victim blaming and online hatred against those who speak up about their experiences (Banet-Weiser, 2021; Stubbs-Richardson et al., 2018).

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[46] According to the National Center for Juvenile Justice (n.d.), African American and Native American girls are more likely to be incarcerated than Asian, White, and Latinx girls. The incarceration rate for girls ages 10–17 is 35 per 100,000 girls, but it varies by race and ethnicity. For Asian girls, it is substantially lower at 4 per 100,000; for White girls, it is 24 per 100,000; and for Latinx girls, it is 27 per 100,000. African American girls are three times more likely than their White peers to be incarcerated (77 per 100,000), and Native American girls are four times more likely (112 per 100,000). Data collected between 2004 and 2010 by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) from 658 youth (ages 13–18) who had either seen a probation officer within the last 30 days or who were currently in a detention center, training school, jail, or prison showed that 31% of girls had experienced sexual abuse and 38.7% had been raped or sexually assaulted (Dierkhising et al., 2013).

[47] The number of sexual assault cases could be higher, due to underreporting among victims.

The literature on girls' experiences with sexual violence, particularly among girls from marginalized populations, is scant. Most research centers on the psychosocial effects of sexual assault on White, middle-class girls and college-age women and their efforts to resist rape culture (see Proweller et al., 2021; Wilmot et al., 2021). It omits girls of color, girls who are homeless, LGBTQ girls, and girls who are disabled—populations that are most impacted by sexual assault and sexual abuse (Harris & Kruger, 2020; Palacios, 2016; Saar et al., 2019). In addition, most responses to rape culture are grounded in paternalistic practices that teach girls that they need to protect themselves rather than focusing on structural issues that could lead to meaningful change (Bernier & Winstanley, 2021; Greenberg & Barton, 2017; Renold, 2018; Wilmot et al., 2021).

Supporting Girls' Healthy Development

Piran and Ross (2005) lay out a few key strategies to support girls' healthy development. They believe that it is critical to amplify girls' voices, to help girls name and challenge stereotypes that limit their experience, and to provide them with access to spaces where they feel nurtured and validated. Girls also need opportunities where they can learn to name, challenge, and transform social inequities in their lives. They advocate for research initiatives that emphasize diverse girlhoods and engage girls as active stakeholders in generating knowledge about their lives.

Section II: An Overview of the Girls' Studies Literature

During the past three decades, the field of girls' studies has reconsidered how it understands girls and engages in ways of theorizing about their lives. It is informed by literature that initially problematized them, then viewed them as victims in need of saving, and now sees them as empowered and having resources to solve challenges that impact their lives (Driscoll, 2008; Johnson & Ginsberg, 2015; Ward & Benjamin, 2004). Alongside these changes, the discourse has also evolved in terms of how it describes, understands, and positions girls and considers the multiplicities of their identities. While the earlier scholarship (1990–1996) focused largely on the experiences of White, middle-class girls, from which universal understandings of girlhood were derived (see Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1994), in recent years, it has grown to include girls from more diverse backgrounds, including Black girls, Muslim girls, girls with disabilities, girls from the Global South, girls who are queer, and girls from low-income backgrounds (see Beckmann Al Wazni, 2015; Bettie, 2014, 2016; Brown, 2009; Monaghan, 2016; Nguyen, 2020; Pirzada, 2017; Stienstra, 2015). While these contributions have helped to broaden understandings of girls' unique circumstances and resulted in a more robust canon of girls' studies literature, Jewish girls are rarely made visible in this discourse. This has been attributed to assimilation, internalized Antisemitism, or the assumption that Jewish girls are not worthy of epistemological study (Weiner, 2019). This leaves a narrow frame from which to understand the experiences of Jewish adolescent girls and their identity-making experiences.

Defining Girlhood: Saving Girls in the 1990s

Girls' studies emerged as an academic discipline in the early 1990s through the joint efforts of White feminist psychologists and educators who sought to understand why girls, namely, White middle-class girls who stood in as representing all girls, experienced a loss of confidence in their personal and academic abilities when they entered adolescence.[48] At the time, the majority of youth-oriented research focused on boys, from which universal understandings of adolescence were derived (see Erikson, 1968; Kohlberg, 1981). Limited attention was being paid to girls, their experiences at school, their bodies, their relationships, and their overall social and emotional development. While the discourse bore a close relationship to women's studies in that scholars used interdisciplinary methods and focused on girls' personal experiences, it did not emerge from an activist movement (Lipkin, 2009).

Several foundational works helped to frame the early girls' studies scholarship, which was hinged upon White middle-class girls' experiences (see Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; 1990; Kilbourne, 1999; Pipher, 1994). Carol Gilligan's (1982) seminal text, *In a Different Voice,* explained that girls' developmental trajectory was rooted in mutuality and relationships, which provided them with an important context for navigating the world. She expanded on this work with Lyn Mikel Brown, with whom she published *Meeting at the Crossroads* (Brown & Gilligan, 1992), a summary of their research at an elite all-girls' school. Their project emphasized the centrality of relationships in young women's lives and the psychological and emotional sacrifices they made to maintain them, which included self-silencing at the expense of their self-esteem. They developed a Listener's Guide, a method of listening to girls' voices, because "girls feel pressure to become selfless or without a voice in relationships" (p. 20), a methodology that came to be widely used for attending to the voices of individuals from marginalized populations (see Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2008; Dawani & Loots, 2021; Giwa et al., 2014).

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[48] Their work grew from a concern that girls were missing the literature on adolescent development, such as Erikson's (1968).

The girls' studies literature has since expanded to consider the multiplicities of girls' lives. Research shows that girls with strong religious, cultural, and/or ethnic identities are better able to maintain a healthy sense of self during adolescence (Clark, 2000; Erkut & Marx, 1995; Hall & Brown-Thirston, 2011; Ward, 2000, 2002). This has been attributed to the positive role-modeling and learned resilience they learn from "other mothers," or adult women in their lives, and the sense of belonging they derive from their racial and/or ethnic group (Collins, 2000, 2019; López & Lechuga, 2007). In her research on Black girls' moral development, Ward (1996, 2002) revealed how Black parents taught their daughters to "resist" racism and develop a positive sense of self by listening to people who shared positive truths about them and ignoring those who shared harmful messages. Yet this research remained peripheral to the mainstream discourse, which centered on White middle-class girls.

At the time, the majority of girl-focused literature showed that girls suffered from a monumental loss of self-esteem when they crossed over from childhood into adolescence (see Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Kilbourne, 1999; Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1994). As noted by

Kilbourne (1999), “girls who were active, confident, feisty at the ages of eight and nine and ten often become hesitant, insecure, self-doubting [and] …their self-esteem plummets” (p. 129). A flurry of literature induced or added to a state of moral panic about the state of White middle-class girls’ emotional fragility and overall well-being. One of the most popular texts at the time included Mary Pipher’s (1994) *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls,* in which she described girls as hapless victims who required rescue from a culture of sexual objectification, disordered eating, violence, drug abuse, and peer pressure. Pipher’s book remained on the *New York Times’s* best seller list for three consecutive years as suburban parents worried about saving their daughters from “a sleazy, toxic culture that nobody understood very well” (Pipher, 2019, para. 8).[49] Pipher also identified strengths girls could develop, like critical media literacy, to combat the media’s negative influences. She also helped facilitate a national discussion about the need to invest in girls’ healthy development, which resulted in programs such as Take Our Daughters to Work Day (Lipkin, 2009).

Scholars and activists also began to contextualize the ways in which girls’ bodies were problematized and commodified by advertising and the media. Joan Brumberg’s (1997) *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* put a historical frame around the ways that girls’ bodies were picked apart so that each part became its own personal “project” that could only be improved through cosmetic products and expensive procedures. She implicated society for placing dangerous and unrealistic expectations on girls to the extent that they found fault with themselves. Others, such as Jean Kilbourne, decried the unrealistic ways that girls and women were portrayed by the advertisement industry and its devastating impact on girls’ and women’s self-esteem.[50] Her work and that of other feminist media critics (see Drake, 2017; Lamb & Brown, 2006; Zurbriggen & Roberts, 2013) raised critical awareness about the ways in which young women of all shapes and sizes were manipulated and misrepresented by the media.

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[49] Pipher shared this reflection of the time during which *Reviving Ophelia* was first published in an NPR *All Things Considered* podcast with Michel Maron on June 30, 2019.

Problematizing Girls

In the late 1990-early 2000s, the girls' studies' landscape shifted in many ways. Scholars shifted their focus from "saving" girls to explaining the complexities of their behavior (Lipkin, 2009; Ward & Benjamin, 2004). New literature and public health campaigns identified worrisome behaviors among girls, including disordered eating, cutting, sexual promiscuity, drug abuse, anxiety, and bullying, which resulted in a "cottage industry" of resources and programs dedicated to empowering girls and building their resilience (see Clark, 2000; Lamb & Brown, 2006; Simmons, 2002; Wiseman, 2002). Rather than looking to the contexts in which girls were raised, the majority of this discourse failed to use an intersectional approach and "perpetuate[d] the myth that there [was] a fundamental flaw in girls and women— one not found in men and boys" (Oliver & Lalik, 2000, p. 19).[51] This was seeded in part by the media's sensationalization of girl-on-girl bullying and "girl fighting," which scholars attributed to the growing influence of reality television and girls' misdirected uses of "girl power" (Brown & Tappan, 2008; Ivashkevich, 2011; Lamb & Brown, 2006; Pasko & Lopez, 2018). Whereas White girls' problems were deemed as "fixable," girls of color were portrayed as unfeminine and dangerous, contributing to pathologizing their behaviors and a fast-growing school-to-prison pipeline (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2018; Pasko & Lopez, 2018). In 1990, girls represented 18% of youth arrests. The number consistently increased over time so that by 2019, girls represented 31% of teen arrests, with girls of color comprising the majority of cases for ages 10 to 17 (National Center for Juvenile Justice, n.d.; Sickmund et al., 2021).

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[50] Kilbourne discusses this in her 1999 documentary *Killing Us Softly*, *Advertising's Image of Women,* and in other subsequent documentaries.

[51] In many ways, this response replicated those of the wider social context, where members of vulnerable and or marginalized populations were blamed for their inability to achieve a White, middle-class sensibility and the lifestyle that accompanied it, including housing, education, a stable income, and health insurance.

Meanness, and Anger. Sharon Lamb's (2002) *The Secret Lives of Girls: What Good Girls Really Do— Sex Play, Aggression, and Their Guilt* uncovered how girls' understanding of race and class affected the ways in which they felt permitted to show anger, aggression, and desire. She interviewed 125 girls and women from diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. She found that while all girls were concerned with meeting standards of normalcy, White middle-class girls faced particular constraints when it came to expressing anger and aggression, which they associated with acting "not-White." Low-income girls and girls of color encountered different barriers. While they were better able to express anger and aggression, they felt they were perceived as incapable of rehabilitation, dangerous, and flawed due to the ways that people associated their behaviors with their race and/or class. However, they were less affected by these judgments and better able to express their thoughts and feelings. Lamb (2002) found that regardless of race, ethnicity, and class, friendships served as an important source of support for all girls, which signaled the need for further research and opportunities for girls to build their strength in this area.

Another prominent author from this time included Rachel Simmons. Like Brown and Gilligan, she conducted her research in elite private schools. Simmon's (2002) bestseller, *Odd Girl Out*, investigated how girls' backstabbing and rumor-spreading behaviors were linked to relational aggression, or girls' inability to express authentic anger. She found that girls were careful to build alliances and seek safety in groups. However, their standards for belonging were fleeting and arbitrary, which stemmed from a fear of engaging in trusting and meaningful relationships. She believed that they could learn healthy communication skills from adults, which she prescribed in her book. Rosalind Wiseman's (2002) *Queen Bees and Wannabees: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends, and the New Realities of Girl World* served as a companion guide to Simmons' (2002) work. She introduced parents and educators to different personality types in girl cliques and offered strategies that parents and caregivers could employ to help girls navigate these challenges, whether they were a "Queen Bee," a bully, or a follower. She remarked that "girls are safer and happier when they look out for each other, yet, paradoxically, during their period of greatest vulnerability, girls' competition with and judgment of each other weakens their friendships and effectively isolates them" (Wiseman, 2002, p. 13).

Sexualization of Girls. In response to girls' increased media consumption and the intensification of misogynistic and sexualized images proliferated by the media, the APA's (2007) *Report on the Sexualization of Girls* highlighted the damaging impact on girls' social and emotional wellbeing and proposed strategies to build their critical media literacy skills. This was seen as a "widespread and rampant societal problem affecting the lives of millions of women [and girls]" (Szymanski et al., 2011, p. 108). Several studies linked how repeated exposure to these corrosive images contributed to depression, low self-esteem, and eating disorders in adolescent girls (see Botta, 2000; Lucas et al., 1991; Mills et al., 2002; Stice et al., 1994; Stice & Shaw, 2003). The report detailed the derogatory and demeaning ways that girls and women were portrayed in television shows, movies, music videos, and song lyrics, video games, and social media. It also focused on the early sexualization of girls, where girls were encouraged to be sexual at ever-earlier ages through products such as Bratz dolls, make-up kits, and kitten heels

(Lamb & Brown, 2006; Levin & Kilbourne, 2008). Other concerns included the glorification of violence against girls and women, particularly women of color, who were often violently raped, attacked, or killed on screen, and the commodification of women and girls' body parts to market products such as pizza, cars, and beer (APA, 2007; Kilbourne, 1999; Lamb & Brown, 2006).

Helping Girls Fight Back. Parents, scholars, and activists feared that these pervasive images would encourage girls to adopt a definition of femininity based on submissiveness and neediness rather than one where they felt empowered and strong (Hall & Brown-Thirston, 2011; Lamb & Brown, 2006; McRobbie, 2009; Tolman, 2002). Heightened concern about these issues led to the development of programs, organizations, and initiatives where girls could learn to reframe sexist messages and develop a healthy sense of self. Some of these included *Full of Ourselves*, a health and wellness curriculum developed by Dr. Catherine Steiner-Adair (2006) and the Harvard Medical School; SPARK Movement, which encouraged girls to fight back against sexist images through activism and organizing; and The Girlhood Project, where girls worked with college students and adult partners to examine issues around representation and their own identities (Edell et al., 2013; Rutstein-Riley et al., 2013; Steiner-Adair & Sjostrom, 2005). Many long-standing organizations, such as the Girl Scouts, also recommitted themselves to investing in girls' leadership and empowerment. However, some of the emerging discourse largely centered on the needs of White, middle-class girls and focused on changing the girl rather than society to accommodate her development (Gonick, 2006; Ward & Benjamin, 2004). It was through girls' organizing efforts that *Seventeen* magazine agreed to stop airbrushing its models' body sizes and complexions (Hu, 2012).

Girlie Power and Feminism. Girls also began to fortify their own resources through girl power and Third Wave feminism, which is a newer, eclectic form of feminism that celebrates multiculturalism, individuality, and generativity (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000; Dicker, 2008). Third Wave feminism became a space for girls to serve as content creators rather than consumers, where participants expressed themselves through music, blogs, art, and “zines,” handmade magazines that could be reproduced in mass quantity at a relatively low cost, which girls shared at feminist festivals and activist “sit-ins” (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000; Lipkin, 2009; Pierpmier, 2009). Girls opined on topics such as sexuality, race, and feminism without constraints from adults or the institutions behind them. The era was also marked by an explosion of Riot Grrrl bands, such as the Pussycat Dolls, Bratmobile, and Bikini Kill, whose music was a fusion of punk rock and feminism. They inspired a new generation of girls to harness their anger, frustration, and collective strength by singing about topics such as anarchy, lesbianism, and rape (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000; Lipkin, 2009). The growing availability of the internet provided girls with an opportunity to examine aspects of their racial, sexual, and gender identities and political power through blogs, chat rooms, and websites (Kearney, 2006; Mazzarella, 2005, 2010b).

Centering Girls of Color

Over time, the literature on girls’ studies became more inclusive of non-White girls. In the late 1990s, Bonnie Leadbeater and Niobe Way’s (1996) *Urban Girls: Resisting Stereotypes, Creating Identities* brought visibility to the multiple and variegated identities of low-income girls of color, first by reclaiming the word “urban” into girls’ studies’ lexicon and then by centering their experiences from a strength-based perspective. The book widened the gaze on this overlooked and underrepresented population by focusing on the many dimensions of their lives, including their friendships, their relationships, their hopes, and their dreams. Whereas the previous literature on low-income girls of color tended to problematize them and minimize their racial and cultural differences, *Urban Girls* focused on thorny topics such as sexuality, mental health, adolescent motherhood, and truth-telling through the prism of racial, cultural, religious, and socioeconomic differences. Leadbeater and Way (2007) expanded on this work in *Urban Girls Revisited: Building Strengths* and examined more closely how girls drew strength from female mentors and used their own internal reserves to build resilience.

Ruth Nicole Brown's (2009) *Black Girlhood Celebration* offered new pedagogical insights on girls of color. She used creative feminist praxis and hip-hop feminism to reflect on the joy of girls' traditions and the pain they experienced from harmful stereotypes and systemic racism. Within the context of Brown's intergenerational girls' group, *Saving Our Lives, Hearing Our Truths* (SOLHOT), girls and women gathered on a weekly basis to speak their truth through storytelling, poetry, rap, dance, and celebration. For example, they remixed the lyrics to the childhood favorite *Little Sally Walker*, which Black girls allegedly learned from the daughters of slave owners (Brown, 2009). By adding their own words, phrases, and dance movements, the SOLHOT members were able to reclaim the song as their own and build a sense of community around it (Brown, 2009). Brown's radical scholarship inspired other scholars to create content with girls whose experiences were also missing from girls' studies' canon and to develop pedagogical tools to center their experiences (see Clonan-Roy et al., 2016; Lindsey, 2014; Rutstein-Riley et al., 2013).

Some of these scholars include Dominique Hill, a SOLHOT scholar-participant, whose concept of "embodied vulnerability" flipped the gaze onto the Black body as "an educative tool for mediating and celebrating the power of the body, invoking identity and mobilizing the body in teaching/learning processes" (2017, p. 2). Hill's authentic leadership provided valuable wisdom for deepening the student-teacher relationship, celebrating marginalized identities, and cultivating new knowledge. SOLHOT, and its emphasis on co-construction and celebration, also provided important direction to The Girlhood Project (TGP), a service-learning program and research initiative that is situated within the undergraduate course *Girlhood: Girl Culture and Identity* at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA. For nine weeks, Lesley faculty, students, and girls from local middle schools and high schools meet in intimate groups where they deconstruct dominant messages about girlhood and co-construct new knowledge about their lives (Rutstein-Riley et al., 2013, Rutstein-Riley & Ziergiebel 2018, 2020; Weiner et al., 2020).

Growth in Scholarship

By the end of the decade, girls' studies was regarded as its own academic discipline (Johnson & Ginsberg, 2015). Scholars maintained that the struggles girls faced were systemically rooted and required activist and intersectional approaches to inquiry (Bettie, 2002; Morris, 2016; Ward & Benjamin, 2004; Williams, 2009). Girls gained a foothold in academic scholarship through the quarterly publication *Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal,* which released its first issue in 2008. The journal gave researchers and practitioners an opportunity to engage in critical discussions about the nature of girls' lives and to share research that they conducted with and about girls. The release of Eline Lipkin's (2009) *Girls' Studies* provided girls' studies students with an overview of the social and historical conditions of American girls' lives. She summarized important scholarship that helped form girls' studies and explained how the discourse responded to critical issues in girls' lives, such as body image, sexual objectification, and sexual identity. However, the coverage of girls' experiences was far from complete. In their historical review of girls' studies scholarship, Ward and Benjamin (2004) recall researchers' failure to identify the ethnicity of girls from various racial groups, which resulted in an othering of their experience. Several girls were also under-represented or absent from the discourse, including girls with disabilities, girls in the Global South, girls from different religious groups, and girls who identified as LGBTQ+, among others (Byers, 2018; de Finney, 2014; Mitchell, 2016; Vanner, 2019; Weiner, 2020).

Expanding Girls' Studies Scholarship

In recent years, the girls' studies scholarship has grown in scope and diversity. The new generation of scholarship places girls actively in the scholarship about them and bears reference to Belenky et al.'s (1986) groundbreaking text, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*, which called upon the unique and unseen ways that women come to know themselves and construct knowledge about their lives. Many projects use participant action research (PAR) methodology and positive youth development (PYD), which aim to decentralize power and solve problems using a ground-up approach (Cahill et al., 2004; Boutwell & Guhad, 2015; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Caron, 2016; Fine et al., 2018; Lerner et al., 2005). For example, Cahill et al.'s (2004) PAR project with urban girls of color examined how negative stereotypes informed people's perceptions of them and their understanding of themselves. Participants made stickers and designed a website to counteract these stereotypes. This consciousness-raising experience made one girl realize that "we were living under the veil of those stereotypes ourselves" (Cahill et al., 2004, p. 238).

While PAR and PYD are widely used among girls' studies scholars and noted for their effectiveness in centering the experiences of youth, there are also deficits to these models. Scholars Katie Clonan-Roy, Charlotte Jacobs, and Michael Nakkula (2016) have expanded PYD to account for variations in Black girls' development. They added three characteristics— critical consciousness, resistance, and resilience— that are essential for Black and Latina girls to successfully navigate issues such as racism, sexism, and discrimination in their daily environments. While PAR provides an important framework for bringing all stakeholders into the research process, the researcher can unwittingly influence the course of the study, particularly when working with youth and people from marginalized populations (Bennett, 2019). They may feel compelled to agree with the researcher or that they are unable to speak freely, particularly when race, class, or other power dynamics are at play. Boutwell and Gouhad’s (2015) version of GirlPAR acknowledges these tensions by addressing the inherent privilege that adults hold over girls through open and honest conversation and also through relational activism, where girls work together to develop knowledge that reflects “the seemingly hidden spaces of [their] daily lives” (pp. 84-85).

These and other contributions have broadened the focus on who girls are and the conditions of their lives. Another factor that has also contributed to the recent expansion of girls’ studies is the internet, which has made it increasingly possible for girls and those who work with them to share ideas and scholarship regardless of a person’s social and/or physical location (Jackson, 2018; Kim & Ringrose, 2018). While internet access is still limited in parts of the developing world, it plays an important role in building knowledge about girls’ lives and disseminating information about them, as well as the history of feminist activism.

Girls Today. In the post-feminist era, which emerged in the late 1990s and maintains that the goals of feminism have already been achieved, girls have been regarded as strong, empowered, and capable of making their own choices (Hall & Rodriguez, 2003; Harris, 2004; Ringrose, 2013). While White, middle-class, cisgender girlhood continues to hold significant weight in the literature, the universality of this experience has been challenged through the proliferation of scholarship that privileges other girlhoods, including indigenous girls, girls from non-Western cultures, girls who live in poverty, girls with disabilities, and girls who are gender fluid and/or gender non-conforming (see Bettie, 2014, 2016; Byers, 2018; de Finney, 2014; Mitchell, 2016; Vanner, 2019). As a result, the field of girls' studies has branched into several sub-disciplines, including critical media studies, indigenous girlhoods, Black girlhood, post-colonial girlhoods, and queer girlhoods. Ward and Benjamin (2004) note that as scholarship becomes more specialized, it can create barriers and contradictions regarding the knowledge that can be understood about girls' lives. They share as an example how understandings of girls' anger can work against them when scholars fail to examine literature from disciplines that are outside their own. This can lead to an ill-informed or narrow interpretation of an issue, particularly when girls' anger is typically pathologized or dismissed. They call for the need for wider collaboration among scholars that is interdisciplinary.

Girls' Activism. Despite the tremendous growth in girls' studies, an identified need exists in the area of social change and activism. Bent (2013) notes that "the research on girls and politics is surprisingly incomplete" (p. 174), as it belies their longtime involvement in social change movements and personal activism. In the past decade, girls' studies scholars have begun to generate scholarship about how girls develop activist identities, where and how they enact activism, the social contexts in which their activism is understood, and the challenges they encounter through this work (see Bent, 2020; de Finney, 2014; Keller, 2015, 2016; Taft, 2011, 2014). However, Jewish girls are absent from this literature, which is similar to Jewish women's invisibility from social change history (see Antler, 2018). This renders Jewish girls' experiences unknowable and obscures their contributions to social change movements and causes.

Taft's (2011) study of 75 girl activists from American and South American countries revealed that many girls experienced their activist work as an extension of their identity. However, they maintained a tenuous relationship with girlhood since their behaviors deviated from those of their peers, who were mostly interested in gossip, fashion, and dating. This posed constraints on their relationship to girlhood and their ability to "fit in" with their peers. This led girl activists to rethink their definition of self and their relationship to their activism.

> Because of their own sense of themselves as not really "fitting in" to the dominant versions of girlhood, many girl activists choose to emphasize their differences from other girls. This sense of separation means that despite their participatory visions, many girls think that most other teens aren't very likely to get involved in activism. Acknowledging that many of their friends and peers just "don't care" and "think activism is nerdy and boring," girls fluctuate back and forth between hoping they can engage other youth and dismissing the possibilities of getting other students involved in social movements. (Taft, 2011, p. 132)

At the same time, girls were reluctant to claim the label of "activist". Rather, they described themselves as "becoming" activists, which Taft interpreted as a sign of humility, an eagerness to learn, and the effect of internalized gender stereotypes. She concluded that while there are specific qualities to girls' activism, it is not uniquely "girl" (2011, p. 191) since participants' activism does not depend on their gender. However, she concluded that the challenges girls experienced resulted from their age and gender. This included the failure of adults with whom they worked to take their thoughts, suggestions, and concerns seriously. They also shared instances where they felt tokenized and alienated from decision-making.

Such instances have been confirmed by other scholars who also study girls' activism (see Bent, 2016; Edell et al., 2016). This particularly holds true for girls of color who serve as ambassadors for programs that are intended to help their communities (Bent, 2016). Rather than being valued for their contributions and lived experiences, there can be an overwhelming tendency, particularly among White women, to underestimate their knowledge and ideas, which can prevent transformative change from occurring (see Bent, 2016; Liou & Literat, 2020). Bent (2016), for example, describes the limited opportunities girls were given to share feedback and ideas on the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women's Working Group on Girls (WGG). Girls were invited to sit quietly during meetings and given pre-written statements to read during committee meetings. According to Brown (2016), "partnering with girls" means "letting go of our need to know more or know better" (p. 121).

Girls engage with a variety of issues. Some advocate for stricter laws and policies around gun control, and others advocate for people's right to bear arms. The same holds true for girls' stances on abortion; some identify with pro-choice movements, and others with pro-life movements. Girls on both sides are committed to acting on behalf of others (Graham, 2022). Some girls begin activist initiatives that are able to attract national and international audiences, such as Sara Blazevic and Varshini Prakash, who started the Sunrise Movement, which addresses climate change through political advocacy and by expanding jobs in environment-focused sectors. Their movement has grown into a national organization. Other girls participate in online activism, which provides them with an opportunity to build coalitions, exercise their voice, and identify with multiple causes. In recent years, youth from marginalized populations have resorted to online activism to build a critical mass for the causes they care about, such as Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ+ support (Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2017). They have also used these platforms to share their personal stories of abuse and reveal their sexual and/or gender identities. While many young people find affirming spaces online, Love and Bradley (2014) also identify the "messiness of new media as a cultural and resistant space" (p. 259) since it can make users vulnerable to bullying, abuse, racism, sexism, surveillance, Antisemitism, and other attacks.

However, online spaces offer girls an important space to cultivate their identities as activists and to build valuable networks around the issues they care about. Girls also affiliate with activist organizations, some of which offer training programs and/or internships for youth, such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Advocates for Youth, Massachusetts Peace Action, City Year, and AmeriCorps (Benjamin, 2013; Proweller et al., 2021). Other girls organize protests, sit-ins, and rallies to respond to global injustices or problems in their communities (Taft, 2011).

It is important to note that the circumstances in which girls' activism occurs are context-dependent. Social, cultural, and geopolitical influences contribute to the ways in which girls are able to practice their activism and how they are recognized for their work (Switzer et al., 2016; Taft, 2007, 2020). For example, Black girls are generally excluded from the discourse on girls' activism because they are viewed as an "at-risk" population that requires "help" and service from others, which prevents them from being seen from a position of strength (Brown, 2013; Morris, 2016). Their activism is typically ignored or viewed as dangerous and disruptive, as was evidenced by the violent acts perpetrated against them by police during several of the Black Lives Matter protests (Lindsey, 2015; Maraj et al., 2018). In some cases, the causes that girls stand for and which disproportionately impact the Black community are appropriated by others. This was the case with #Metoo, a movement started by Tarana Burke, a Black woman who experienced sexual abuse when she was younger and who heard countless stories from other young survivors (Boyd & McEwan, 2022). White middle-class girls and women benefited from awareness around this issue, while those who were most vulnerable continued to suffer without recourse (Boyd & McEwan, 2022).

Some girls are provided with safer contexts than others to practice their activism. A good case in point is the Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai, who in 2012 survived an attempted murder by the Taliban for speaking out about her belief in girls' right to education (Yousafzai, 2013). Her miraculous survival turned her into an overnight celebrity and turned Western nations' attention to her campaign (Brown, 2016; Olesen, 2016). In recent years, she, Naomi Wadler, and other girl activists, such as Emma Gonzalez and Greta Thunberg, have been singled out by the media for their bravery, passion, and poise. They have become celebrities in their own right; their powerful messaging and dedication to their causes have landed them on the covers of popular magazines like *Time*, *The New Yorker*, *The Cut*, *Vogue*, *Teen Vogue*, *Newsweek*, *People*, *GQ*, *Rolling Stone*, *Wired*, *Glamour*, and *New York Magazine.* In 2019, Thunberg was named *Time Magazine's* Person of the Year, an honor typically bestowed on an adult who has achieved a lifetime's worth of accomplishments. Also in 2013, Yousafzai became recognized as one of *Time's* most influential people in the world.

Taft (2020) notes that girls such as these "are distinctively desirable figures because they represent a brighter, better future" (p. 6). At the same time, their identities can work against them since they are seen by others as "hopeful but harmless," which can downplay the importance and urgency of their causes (p. 6). Critics further maintain that the media's recent attention to girl activists commodifies them and positions their activism as an "exceptional" form of girlhood (Projansky, 2014; Ryalls & Mazzarella, 2021; Taft, 2020). Many girl activists have come of age in an era of "girl empowerment," where they have been told that they can achieve anything, including activism, if they put their minds to it (Harris, 2004; Taft, 2011, 2020). However, this puts a tremendous amount of pressure on girls since they are no longer seen as vulnerable subjects but rather as capable individuals who can single-handedly solve the world's problems

(Gonick et al., 2020). This minimizes the very issues that girls struggle with, such as sexism, rape culture, sexual harassment, and unequal access to education, since it places the burden on girls rather than those who are accountable for creating these problems in the first place (Bent, 2016, 2020; Vanner & Dugal, 2020).

In many cases, girl activists must battle against the very systems they seek to change (Bent, 2016, 2020; Gonick et al., 2020; Taft, 2011; Vanner & Dugal, 2020). However, many of the issues girls seek to address, such as unfair housing practices, hunger and food insecurity, and laws and policies around gender equality, are deeply entrenched issues that are rooted within long-standing histories of racism, sexism, and other forms of injustice, which can limit their ability to influence change. This can drive competition or create distance between girls and erase other forms of girls' activism that are not centered in the media (Brown, 2016; Switzer, 2013). It also obscures the movements behind girls and conveys the message that "spectacular girls appear to change the world all on their own" (Bent, 2016, p. 107).[52,53] Taft (2020) attributes this to a function of neoliberalism, where girls are "not only expected to thrive as empowered, self-reliant individuals, but to also uplift their communities and nations" (p. 4).

Brown (2016) notes, "The girl activists who make the nightly news are the ones easily reimagined into salable commodities…. A salable story has a combination of youthful innocence

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[52] The concept of "spectacular girlhood"' was identified by Sarah Projansky in her 2014 book, *Spectacular Girls: Media Fascination and Celebrity Culture*, to describe the ways that girl activists have been identified by the media.

[53] This is a larger problem in narratives about activist movements that is not unique to girls. For example, Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks became the faces of the Civil Rights Movement, obscuring countless other activists.

and precocious entrepreneurial independence" (p. 17). Brown elaborates on these racialized, class-based, heteronormative standards:

> In a media culture where journalists both hype and wring their hands over the current state of (too aggressive, too slutty, too mouthy, too bitchy) girlhood, the perfect sale is the fantasized feminine ideal, unmarked by race or class or sexuality, unmarked by localized identities or experiences. (p. 17)

Girl activists who speak outside of these bounds or who go "off script" are deemed unknowable, disruptive, and rebellious (Bent, 2020; McRobbie, 2009), which can direct attention away from the causes they care about and onto their character. In her analysis of girl activists' tenuous relationship to social media, Bent (2020) describes how Emma Gonzalez's outspokenness rendered her both a hero and a target of extremist hatred from the political right.[54] The constant media attention and judgment of her character challenged Gonzalez to a point where she stepped away from her activism. On the other hand, Chilean activist Camila Vallejo was recognized by popular media outlets not for her radical views of neoliberalism and capitalism but for her beauty. This suggests that girls' activism is evaluated by a different set of standards than those reserved for men, boys, and older women.

As the scholarship grows, Switzer et al. (2016) cite the need for focused attention to girls in the Global South, who are seen as "empowered" agents due to the impact of the "girl effect" from multinational corporations, NGOs, and other sources of aid that invest in their education and economic development. However, many girls are placed in a double bind: they are also expected to "save their countries" from famine, disease, and corruption while also suffering from the effects of civil unrest, poverty, and sexual violence. Switzer et al. (2016) claim that “instead of articulating comprehensive and transformative rights for girls, including economic, political, social, and cultural rights, market-centered rationalities drive the idea of "tapping into” girls' economic potential to fill the gap” (p. 35), which turns them into profit-making subjects instead of minors who require protection from adults. This erases the hardships girls face and prevents a more nuanced understanding of their lives. Keller (2016) cites the need for feminist researchers to consider “activism from the perspective of girls, whose lives are often situated within particular material, social, and material constraints” (p. 262) due to the effects of capitalism and abuses of power.

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[54] Sharon Mazzarella also analyzes how headlines referred to Gonzalez as the "skin-headed Latina lesbian".

Girls’ Studies Today

As understandings of girlhood continue to grow and change, a few things remain constant. Girlhood is best understood as a social construct that is unique to each girl and is based on her specific circumstances. Research with girls should be interpreted through a multidisciplinary and intersectional lens. It is important to understand how unearned privilege, power, race, class, ethnicity, and gender or sexual orientation shape girls’ lives. Girls should be valued for the wisdom they hold and for their ability to solve challenges that affect their lives. As scholarship on girls’ studies continues to grow, scholars must keep in mind that girls already have agency. Discourse with and about girls should include their voices and other forms of self-expression. It should benefit girls and honor their diverse communities. Girls’ studies scholars should reflect what girls are saying without speaking for them or deciding the best course of action for them. This fundamental shift in agency requires girlhood scholars to consider where and how to place girls in relation to the scholarship about their lives and to recognize the importance of voice.

Section III: Jewish Girls in the Girls' Studies Literature

Despite the tremendous growth that has occurred within girls' studies, Jewish girls are rarely made visible in the girls' studies discourse. A few exceptions exist. Some scholars who have conducted research on Jewish girls include Beth Cooper Benjamin (2010); Beth Cooper Benjamin and Jodie Gordon (2008); Linda Borish (2019); Michele Clark (2000); Ayala Fader (2009); Melissa Klapper (2005); Riv-Ellen Prell (1999, 2007); and Amira Proweller, Beth Catlett, and Sonya Crabtree-Nelson (2021).

However, in most cases, Jewish girls are typically enveloped under the identity category of "Whiteness," which fails to underscore the impact of Jewishness on their lives and the breadth of racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and religious diversity that exists within the population.[55] This may be due to the tendency among researchers to collapse religion under other social identity categories, such as race and class. As a result, Jewish girls are made invisible because their dominant identity of Whiteness subsumes their Jewishness— a function of the dominant culture, which is White and Christian. However, some Jews feel that Judaism is their primary identity. Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz (1991) notes, "Jewishness is a peoplehood, a culture, a shared history, [and] an ethnic identity" (p. 10), which reflects longstanding tensions felt by many Jews regarding the need for visibility on behalf of their ethno-religious identity.[56]

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[55] This is based on the erroneous assumption that all Jews are White, which, I am arguing, erases the racial and ethnic diversity that exists within the population.

[56] While poignant, Kaye/Kantrowitz's quote does not represent the experiences of all Jews. Rather, this emphasizes the point that Judaism has been referred to as a religious identity and an ethnic identity in academic scholarship (see Weisskirch et al., 2016).

Furthermore, Jewish girls are rarely examined through an intersectional perspective, which ignores the multiple identities they hold regarding power, privilege, and oppression. Sirin and Fine (2008) refer to Muslim American youth in post-September 11 America as having "hyphenated" identities, "a pivotal psychological hinge where religious and ethnic identities cast 'in tension' are at once joined and separated," since they can experience moments of belonging and otherness (p. 195). Jewish girls might experience similar tensions if they feel that their Jewishness sets them apart from the dominant society, despite the fact that they also feel a part of it. This could happen when their historical experiences are missing from the curriculum at school or when they experience reductive stereotypes on account of their religion (Bakal et al., 2015; Benjamin & Gordon, 2007; Byers, 2009). Sirin and Fine (2008) offer the solution of using hyphenated identities, such as Muslim-American, to explain the complicated interplay of identities that young people must negotiate.

Jewish girls are not alone when it comes to navigating multifaceted identities. It is instructive to examine the developmental experiences of other girls who also navigate complicated identity arrangements, including Black girls, Asian American girls, Latinx/Hispanic girls, and Muslim girls, to understand how they also navigate the challenges of adolescence and develop healthy identities.

Black Girls

Black girls are a diverse group that includes girls who are the descendants of slaves as well as those who are recent immigrants from diverse nations, including Africa, the Caribbean, and mixed-race girls (Pew Research Center, 2021). In 2019, there were 3,405,983 Black youth between the ages of 12 and 17 in America (Kids Count Data Center, 2020). As of February 2022, 24.9% of Black youth lived in poverty (Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia

University, 2022). While Black girls are disproportionately impacted by the interlocking forces of racism, sexism, and poverty, they are noted to maintain high levels of global self-esteem due to the connections they derive from their families and communities (Adams, 2010; Butler-Barnes & Inniss-Thompson, 2020; Butler-Barnes et al., 2017; Williams, 2009), a process that Scott (2022) refers to as "light making." Furthermore, Black girls may externalize their problems and attribute them to environmental factors such as racism and discrimination as a form of learned resistance (Adams, 2010; Clonan-Roy et al., 2016). Despite this, Black girls are typically portrayed through a problematizing lens that pathologizes their development and adultifies them (Morris, 2016; Neal-Jackson, 2018). This masks their vulnerabilities and prevents them from accessing services to build up their social and emotional health (Epstein et al., 2017).

Stephens and Phillips (2003) note that "the good, innocent, virginal girl continues to be an idealized image of womanhood associated with White females, but unattainable for African American females" (p. 4). Scholars have called for research initiatives to celebrate and uplift Black girls' unique experiences and to center their specific needs in their efforts to combat racism (see Brown, 2009; Lindsay-Dennis, 2015).

Asian American Girls

Asian American girls are a diverse group whose experiences vary based on their country of origin, their ethnic group, their socioeconomic status, and their family's generational status. However, their experiences are typically viewed as a monolith, which blurs their heterogeneity and their complex needs (Player, 2022; Shih et al., 2019). In 2019, there were 1,279,968 Asian American youth between the ages of 10 and 17 in the United States (Kids Count Data Center, 2020). Compared to other minority groups, Asian families earn a higher standard of living and more advanced education, conferring girls the pejorative status of "model minority," a stereotype that positions them as submissive, studious, and mathematically inclined, or conversely, as sexualized “China dolls” (Cho, 1997; Shih et al., 2019). This reinforces their status as “forever foreigners” and can limit how they see themselves and how others perceive them (Chou & Feagin, 2015). A closer examination of the data reveals a more complex picture, as average household earnings and rates of educational attainment vary by ethnic group (Shih et al., 2019).[57] Literature shows that regardless of ethnicity, many girls feel the weight of parental expectations, acculturation stress, alienation from non-Asian peers, and heightened expectations from teachers due to stereotypes (Chou & Feagin, 2015; Player, 2022; Tokunaga, 2016).

Asian American girls ages 15 to 24 have the highest rates of depression and suicide among any racial or ethnic group, which can stem from acculturation stress, the impact of racism, and anxiety (Hwang & Goto, 2008; Kim-Goh et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2009). These tensions are exacerbated by cultural stigmas against discussing mental health and a lack of culturally appropriate services (Lee et al., 2009; Qin & Han, 2011). As Tokunaga (2016) and

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[57] People from Taiwanese (75.3%), Asian Indian (71.3%), and Mongolian (60.2%) backgrounds earn the highest levels of bachelor’s degrees, and those from Cambodian (17%), Hmong (16.7%), Laotian (14.5%), and Bhutanese (13.9%) backgrounds earn the lowest (Shih et al., 2019). Asian Americans are also the highest wage earners in America (Shih et al., 2019). Survey data collected between 2008 and 2012 revealed that the average Asian American family earned $71,709, compared to Whites (average $56,203). The national average was $53,046 (Shih et al., 2019). However, as with rates of educational attainment, there is a great deal of variation between ethnic groups. For example, while Asian Indians earn an average income of $95,000 and Filipino Americans earn $80,000. Others, such as Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotian Americans, have average income levels below $53,000 (Shih et al., 2019), giving this group the biggest income gap among all racial groups in America (Lopez et al., 2017). American Asians overall have a higher overall level of educational attainment (50.5%) than Whites’ (33.2%; Shih et al., 2019).

Player (2022) observe, it is essential to provide Asian American girls with affirming spaces to critically examine their identities.

Hispanic and Latinx Girls

Hispanic and Latinx girls are a diverse group that consists of girls with heritage from South or Central America, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, or the Dominican Republic (Denner & Guzmán, 2006). Despite the fact that Hispanic and Latinx girls are the largest minority group in the United States, research on their lives is sparse. There is a tendency among researchers to aggregate them as a collective group, which blurs important cultural and ethnic differences (Ward & Benjamin, 2004). As of 2019, there were 6,224,795 Hispanic and Latinx youth between the ages of 12 and 17 in the United States (Kids Count Data Center, 2020). For many girls, family serves as the primary source of cultural transmission (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2009). It is where girls learn gender scripts and definitions for acceptable girlhood (Gallegos-Castillo, 2006). Many families impress conservative ideals upon their daughters that are consistent with their religious and cultural beliefs, which can make it difficult for girls to develop a bicultural identity and a healthy sexuality and sense of self (Gallegos-Castillo, 2006; Garcia, 2009). As noted by Gallegos-Castillo (2006), “Too often, family expectations conflict with young women’s desire for autonomy, discovery, and freedom” (p. 44).

Hispanic Girls, Racism, Poverty, and Class. Girls from working-class families may also face extraneous pressure to contribute to family income or help with household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for siblings, while boys are able to enjoy more freedom (Gallegos-Castillo, 2006). While many Latinx and Hispanic girls live in communities that are ridden with violence and poverty, they do not ascribe to these stereotypes but rather defy them by speaking out, challenging family rules, debating, and creating alternative versions of themselves (Denner

& Guzmán, 2006; Flores, 2021). In addition, many girls attend school in anti-immigrant contexts. This can hinder their academic success and damage their self-esteem (Gallegos-Castillo, 2006; García et al., 2012; Gutíerrez, 2014). However, there are few resources to support their healthy development and to understand how they make sense of their experiences (Denner & Guzmán, 2006). The majority of research is deficit-based and focuses on issues such as school drop-out, teen pregnancy, and gang involvement rather than systemic factors that can drive these behaviors, such as acculturation stress, poverty, and discrimination (Denner & Guzmán, 2006; Dietrich, 1998; Sikes, 1998). As of February 2022, 23.4% of Hispanic and Latinx youth lived in poverty (Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, 2022). Flores (2021) notes that Latina girls are "fighting to be heard" (p. 66) about the injustices they experience and the knowledge they hold.

Muslim American Girls

Muslim American girls are a racially and ethnically diverse group that consists of girls from many racial and ethnic backgrounds, including the United States, the Middle East, North Africa, Southeast Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa (Pew Research Center, 2017). Three-quarters of Muslims in the United States are immigrants or the children of immigrants, which can pose acculturation challenges for girls from first- and second-generation families (Pew Research Center, 2017; Sirin & Fine, 2008). American Muslims' standards of living and levels of educational attainment mirror those of other Americans, though their levels of unemployment far exceed those of other Americans (Pew Research Center, 2017). American Muslims are a relatively young population. The percentage of Muslim Americans ages 18–29 is 35%, compared to 21% for the overall US population (Pew Research Center, 2017). This is due in part to religious values, which encourage large families. The average Muslim American family has 2.4 children, compared to the national average of 2.1 (Pew Research Center, 2017).

Some girls are raised in religious contexts, while others are secular. Those who are religious are encouraged to adopt traditional gender roles that position girls as guardians of their family's honor. They demonstrate this by adhering to the highest tenets of modesty in public spaces through veiling and restricting their contact with boys and men outside of the family unit (Zine, 2008). As noted by Hannell (2021), "for some Muslim girls, the elasticity of girlhood is tied to cultural, familial, and religious norms surrounding marital status" (p. 50). Veiling and burqa wearing, or full body coverings, have become a source of contention in many Western cultures because they are regarded as patriarchal practices that deprive girls and women of their agency (Aziz, 2022).[58] However, these laws and policies have also been viewed as anti-Muslim since they specifically target Muslims and deny them freedom over their religious and cultural expression (Zempi, 2019). Some girls actively choose to wear a hijab since they feel that it is a positive affirmation of their Muslim identity (Hermansen & Khan, 2009). Navigating two distinct cultures can pose confusion and hardships for girls, leading them to feel a sense of "misrecognition" from dominant discourses around them (Meer et al., 2010; Sirin & Fine, 2008; Zine, 2008).

A 2021 survey of 708 Muslim students between the ages of 11 and 18 in California found that 55% "fe[lt] unsafe, unwelcome or uncomfortable" at school because of their religion (The Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2021, p. 6). A Massachusetts survey yielded similar results. In particular, girls who wore hijabs felt that they were singled out by teachers and their peers alike. They were told things like, “You don’t belong here” (Nittle, 2021). Few analyses understand the nuances of Muslim American girlhood and position girls as either victims in need of saving or over-center their power to escape the shackles of their oppressive culture (Hannell, 2021; Keddie, 2014; Muhtaseb, 2020). They are rarely seen as typical girls who live ordinary lives. Moreover, policies that are intended to serve them tend to over-center boys and evade their needs (Hannell, 2021). Hannell recommends “participatory storytelling” as a method for Muslim girls to critique social structures around them and share their positionality. McArthur and Muhammad (2017) underscore the importance of exposing Black Muslim girls, who are doubly marginalized, to positive role models and giving them space to write their own narratives.

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[58] Several European countries, including Belgium, Austria, and the Netherlands, have banned Muslim girls and women from wearing burqas in public spaces, including schools and places of employment (Aziz, 2022). France is among the most virulent with its discriminatory laws and policies (Aziz, 2022).

Research on Jewish Girls

The current scope of research on Jewish girls is consistent with larger trends in the girls’ studies discourse that range from seeing girls at risk, to problematizing them, to viewing them from a position of strength. While the literature is scant and mostly dated, it reveals several important yet contradictory themes about who Jewish girls are and how they live their lives. Jewish girls have been portrayed as privileged, vulnerable, empowered, and at-risk (see Benjamin & Gordon, 2008; Catlett et al., 2019, 2020; Clark, 2000; Philips, 1997; Pinhas et al., 2008). This largely depends on the methods used, who is asking the questions and how they are being asked, and where girls stand in relation to the research that is being conducted about them. While these findings are important, they present an incomplete version of who Jewish girls are and how they make meaning of their experiences.

The research largely fits into three categories: ethnographies of religious, mainly Hasidic (ultra-Orthodox) girls; deficit-based research that focuses on incidences of eating disorders; and feminist scholarship that examines identity-making experiences among Jewish girls (see Altman et al., 2016; Bakal et al., 2015; Benjamin & Gordon, 2008; Catlett et al., 2019, 2020; Clark, 2000; Philips, 1997). The last category consists of "voice-specific" scholarship produced almost 30 years ago and recent scholarship generated *with* girls, reflecting widely adopted practices in girls' studies research (Driscoll, 2008; Moscowitz & Carpenter, 2014). This work is enhanced by data from Jewish organizations and institutions that describe Jewish girls' participation and identity making experiences in communal programs and activities.

Ethnographic Research on Hasidic Girls. Most ethnographies of Hasidic girls are authored by non-Hasidic women who are driven to understand how girls come of age in these tightly cloistered environments. Two seminal works, Stephanie Levine's (2003) *Mystics, Mavericks and Merrymakers* and Ayala Fader's (2009) *Mitzvah Girls*, draw heavily upon Brown and Gilligan's (1992) voice-centered scholarship to ground Hasidic girls' social and emotional development.

As a doctoral student in English, Levine (2003) conducted her research with girls in the Hasidic *Lubavitcher* community of Crown Heights, New York.[59] Raised as a secular Jew, she examined whether Hasidic adolescent girls developed an independent sense of self amidst strongly prescribed rules for intimacy, modesty, and daily conduct. The girls she met were on the verge of finishing school and preparing for marriage, an expectation impressed upon girls from a young age.[60] Levine immersed herself in the community by meeting with girls and their families. She participated in community-wide events, such as holiday celebrations and *simchas*, which were causes for celebration. Using the girls' own terminology, she observed that there were three types of girls: *chassidishe,* who unquestioningly followed the tenets of Hasidism; "normal," who preferred mainstream social conventions over Lubavitch ideals; and "nebby," who were soft-spoken and studious. Through these interactions, she realized that "originality and personal flair" (Levine, 2003, p. 202) were not valued in girls. Those who aspired to pursue higher education and/or delay marriage were met with challenges that threatened their place in the community and/or limited their possibilities for individual growth.

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[59] Lubavitch Hasids are known for their emphasis on spirituality.

[60] Lubavitch communities have strongly prescribed rules for marriage, which include a *shidduch*, or an arranged marriage.

Despite this, Levine observed that the Crown Heights girls fared better than non-religious girls since they were largely removed from the toxic influences of the media, consumerism, and popular culture. She observed this through the girls' ability to address conflict directly with one another and in the way that they treated one another with kindness and respect. She attributed this to their internalization of Hasidic values, which encouraged them to "nurture each Jew's unique and vibrant soul" (Levine, 2003, p. 15). For example, when one girl was hurt by another girl's comment, several others helped to ameliorate the situation. In the end, both girls heard each other's perspective and apologized— an example of their values at work. However, not all girls were able to conform to Crown Heights' restrictive culture. For example, one girl moonlighted as a stripper, while another struggled to balance her professional aspirations against the community's rigid expectations for girls. Levine ultimately concluded that while some of the girls' struggles were unique, such as whether to get married or stay in the community, their wants and needs also resembled those of non-Hasidic girls, including the desire for love, friendship, and material wealth.

Fader (2009), a linguistic anthropologist, examined how girls in Boro Park, a Hasidic neighborhood in Brooklyn, used language to construct and negotiate their identities. Unlike boys, girls navigated between English and Yiddish in order to insulate boys and men from the non-religious, English-speaking, "Gentile" world. While language served as a powerful medium for girls to develop agency, they also needed to learn the boundaries of acceptability, which were mediated by cultural norms for modesty and decency. Girls who were unable to achieve this balance, for example, by speaking English or by using Yiddish slang words within the home, were deemed subversive and subject to reprimand by older girls and women who served as gatekeepers for their education, modesty, and upbringing. As a means of self-preservation, girls were required to carefully guard their thoughts and feelings, which left them with limited opportunities to develop an independent sense of voice and self.

Girls' access to alternative knowledge was further compromised by heavy censorship over "toxic" influences, including secular literature, television, and social media. These and other practices were justified through the practice of *kedusha*, or holiness, which provided guidance to girls and affirmed their way of living. Interestingly, Fader (2009) observed that many girls and their mothers found ways to purchase, hide, and consume these "forbidden" materials. They purchased radios and played them softly when men were out of the home, and they hid magazines under their beds, which indicated that they were curious to learn about the world outside their community. Fader (2009) concluded that despite their limited agency, language provided girls with an important medium to construct multiple and fluid identities, which they used to develop agency and silently innovate change in their community in ways that were unknown to men.

Levine and Fader's scholarly works offer important insights into the lives of Hasidic girls, particularly since researchers are rarely allowed into these communities. In cases when they are, girls are typically exoticized and viewed through the lens of "other" (Page & Yip, 2017). Both provide an unproblematized way of understanding girls' development and how they make sense of their identities. Their findings lend important ways to understand how Hasidic girls' development both resembles and differs from that of non-religious girls. Their findings indicate important directions for future inquiry, such as how Hasidic girls navigate issues around personal desire, gender identity, religious belief, and where and how they exercise resistance. Some of these issues are also explored in Deborah Feldman's (2012) autobiography, *Unorthodox*: *The Scandalous Rejection of My Hasidic Roots,* in which she details her experiences growing up in the *Satmar* community in Brooklyn.[61] While hers was not a positive experience and one filled with abuse and trauma, her narrative also provides an important perspective on Hasidic girlhood. Sarna (2004) further emphasizes the richness and diversity of Hasidic American Jews in his 2005 book, *American Judaism: A History*. These collective stories underscore the fact that there is still a great deal to learn about Hasidic girlhood and the diversity of girls' experiences.

In their collective biography, *Becoming Girl: Collective Biography and the Production of Girlhood,* Gonick and Gannon (2014) offer a critique of girls' studies scholarship. "It is interested in fragmenting the idea of 'the girl' (and a unified culture) and draws attention to differences among girls, including how raced, ethnicized, classed, sexed, political, religious, national, and other identifications and locations vary the available and acceptable practices of girlhood and its experience" (Gonick & Gannon, 2014, p. 1). While girls' studies scholars have responded to the need for plurality by centering the experiences of transnational girls and low-income girls (Strzepek, 2015), there is a great deal of religious diversity among Jewish girls that requires further consideration in the literature. Many other religious sects, denominations, and groups besides Hasidim exist within Judaism, such as girls who are modern Orthodox or those who are raised within the context of a particular youth movement ideology, yet their meaning-making experiences are largely absent in the literature. This reflects a growing need to develop pedagogy and methods to acknowledge the lives of girls who are raised within religious contexts and examine how their religious practices and beliefs impact their lived experiences.

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[61] The Satmar community, which is also located in Brooklyn, is known to be one of the most observant Hasidic communities (Sarna, 2004).

Eating Disorders Research on Jewish Girls; "Fixing" the Girl. Another topic of research focuses on the etiology and prevalence of risk factors and behaviors among Jewish girls. This has become a prominent theme in the literature due to cultural factors that emphasize food, thinness, and academic and personal achievement (Musleah, 2009). While these issues are also common in other populations, they can become inflamed in Jewish girls. For example, one study found that 25% of Jewish girls, compared to 18% of non-Jewish girls, presented with an eating disorder, suggesting that rates among Jewish girls far exceed those of the general population (Pinhas et al., 2008).[62] Research further suggests that Orthodox girls struggle with eating disorders at a higher rate than non-Orthodox girls due to the restrictive lifestyle and pressure to achieve an ideal body size in order to increase their chances for marriageability. However, exact numbers are unknown since many families withhold or delay treatment due to a fear of stigma (Kelly, 2010; Rabin, 2011). Unfortunately, the majority of research with Orthodox girls tends to examine the relationship between their religious beliefs and their eating and ignores environmental factors, which results in a valuable loss of knowledge since a community-wide approach is required to reverse these worrying trends (see Latzer et al., 2015; Weinberger-Litman et al., 2016).

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[62] While there were no detectable differences between Orthodox and non-Orthodox girls in the study, rates may be higher among Orthodox girls than is currently understood. They may withhold getting help and/or receiving treatment due to fear of stigma or ruining their chances of marriageability (Kelly, 2010; Rabin, 2011).

Most of the data on Jewish girls and disordered eating/eating disorders is collected through quantitative surveys that look for incidences of behaviors rather than the etiology of the issue. While this information is helpful in quantifying an issue, it does little to ascertain whether contributing factors such as pressure to assimilate, underlying psychological issues, and genetic factors also influence behaviors in girls (Latzer et al., 2015; Musleah, 2009; Rabin, 2011). A study conducted by Pinhas et al. (2008) in Toronto to examine patterns of disordered eating among Jewish and non-Jewish teens, as well as Orthodox and non-Orthodox teens, reveals the shortcomings of this method. The authors administered two survey instruments: the Eating Attitudes Test (EAT) and a demographic survey. The EAT asks about personal behaviors with dieting, bulimia, and preoccupation with food. Sample questions include: “I am terrified about being overweight,” or, “Over the past month, did you ever make yourself sick (vomit) to control your weight or shape?” (Garner et al., 1982). Questions such as these are designed to diagnose symptoms rather than reveal reasons as to why individuals might engage in these behaviors. In the demographic survey, participants were asked questions about their weight, their eating habits, their religious practice, and their ethnicity.

While measures such as EAT can help determine the scope and intensity of an issue, they are only as effective as they are specific. The authors did not collect data on other identity categories such as race, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, nationality, gender identity, and/or physical ability. These and other variables could have helped to provide a more nuanced understanding of *which* girls struggled with these issues. They could also assist with the development of targeted interventions for those most in need of assistance and explanatory models for understanding the complex relationship between food, class, caregiving responsibilities, gender norms, and more. In their findings, Pinhas et al. (2008) found a few troubling patterns among Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jewish girls. They weighed more than non-Jewish girls and exhibited less self-control around food. Jewish girls also reported a higher rate of binging and disordered eating. The authors concluded that “this population [Jewish girls] [is] indeed vulnerable to eating disordered attitudes and behaviors” (Pinhas et al., 2008, p. 606). While this is an important first step in identifying a wide-ranging problem, it is also important to let girls share where their struggles emerge from. This would contribute to a sense of empowerment.

Catherine Steiner-Adair (2006), who has developed curricula and lectured widely on the topic of eating disorders in both Jewish and non-Jewish girls, believes that cultural factors, including perfectionism and pressure to succeed, can provoke the issue in White middle-class Jewish girls.

> A girl who comes from a family obsessed with too narrow a definition of success… feels that she is not going to be valued in her family because she isn't going to be a doctor or lawyer, or go to an Ivy League school… one thing the dominant culture tells her is, ‘You want to feel successful about yourself, just become the thinnest in the room. That will be your source of status, your source of power. You'll show everyone that you are in control, that you are really strong and self-disciplined.’ (para. 19)

In other words, some Jewish girls succumb to eating disorders because they feel inadequate in other aspects of their lives. This suggests that girls who are assimilated are more likely to abide by and struggle against the norms and values of the dominant culture. While these problems exist with other groups of religious girls, such as Muslim and Catholic girls (Ellison & Henderson, 2011; Lelwica et al., 2009; Ramón-Jarne et al., 2019), the research on Jewish girls far exceeds that of other religious groups, which suggests that the relationship between food, religious expectations, assimilation, and culture is more complicated for Jewish girls.

While the significance of Pinhas et al.'s (2008) findings should not be underestimated, they must be interpreted with the knowledge gathered from the girls themselves. Boutwell and Gouhad (2015) note that despite academia’s growing attention to the lives of girls, girls themselves are often excluded from the production of knowledge about their lives or strategies to improve them. The poet and activist Audre Lorde (1984) aptly stated that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (p. 27). Her statement suggests that failures perpetrated by the research community and programs that strive to “fix” girls uphold their marginalization since they fail to address systemic issues, such as sexualization and objectification, that contribute to their oppression.

This is evidenced by the many well-intentioned programs that are offered through Jewish social service providers. One of these includes *Bishvili* (For Me), a 2008 eating disorder prevention program developed by Catherine Steiner-Adair and Lisa Sjostrom during the height of the “girl power” movement. *Bishvili* uses Jewish texts and values to empower girls to love and cherish their bodies. The authors created two editions; one for Orthodox girls, which uses traditional prayers, and one for non-Orthodox girls. In an excerpt from the Orthodox version, girls are asked to examine text from Pirkei Avot [The Laws of the Fathers] verse 5:27, which reads, “אל תסתכל בקנקן אלא במה שיש בו” or, “Don’t look at the container but look at what is inside it'” (Steiner-Adair & Sjostrom, 2005, p. 11). Girls are asked to analyze this text and relate it to their own self-image. While an activity like this can lead to a powerful shift in a girl’s self-perception, it also implies that it is the *girl* who needs to change rather than the society in which she lives.

Driscoll (2008) notes that “girls’ studies has pushed girls' status as representatives of culture into data about the state of society” (p. 26). Given the prevalence of disordered eating and body image issues among Jewish adolescent girls (who have been included in research), it is critical for girls to also have access to opportunities where they can name the changes in their lives. Some Jewish activists, such as Rabbi Minna Bromberg and auto mechanic Chaya Milchtein, have discovered ways to connect their spiritual beliefs with body-affirming practices (see Bolton-Fasman, 2021; Gerson, 2020). Milchtein, who is also queer, was raised in a Hasidic household. She recalls how her father, from whom she is now estranged, berated her for her weight, particularly when it came time to find a suitor. “‘You have to lose weight,’ my father told me. I didn’t have a scale, so he told me to go to the UPS store and to get weighed on a package scale” (Gerson, 2020, para. 10). Milchtein, who is now in her 20s, advises people of all faiths and backgrounds on ways to find bodily contentment, find fashion that they love, and how to fix and purchase automobiles. While hers is likely not the experience of most Jewish girls, her story highlights one of many contexts in which they come of age.

Future inquiries on eating disorders and body image issues among Jewish girls should focus on more diverse populations, such as girls who are non-White, girls who are unaffiliated, girls from low-income communities, and girls from geographically remote communities, in order to understand *which* populations of Jewish girls are affected and if and how they manifest differently across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these issues impact a wider cross-section of Jewish girls and determine how to respond to them in a religiously, socially, and culturally sensitive girl-centered approach.

Feminist Research: Voice-Specific Research. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, two developmental psychologists, Michele Clark and Carol Philips, began to interrogate Jewish girls' absence from the literature on girls' development. Philips and Clark conducted their research with White middle-class Jewish girls to determine whether they held onto their voices during adolescence.

Philips (1997) conducted a case study with 15-year-old Hannah, an outspoken Jewish girl who identified as a cultural Jew. Her study was informed by the belief that Jewish and Black girls navigated a similar developmental trajectory since both cultures inculcated "healthy courage" in girls to navigate the world.[63] She demonstrated this by using Brown and Gilligan's (1992) Voice Centered method, which emphasizes what people say and the meanings they ascribe to their words. She compared Hannah's speech against Liza's, a participant in Brown and Gilligan's study who was presumably not Jewish. Philips (1997) drew attention to Liza's effusive use of "I don't know," an indicator of self-doubt, to demonstrate Hannah's confidence against Liza's reticence.

In a conversation about relationships, Liza utters the phrase "I don't know" four times. She says, "I don't know. Like you are, I don't know, you're sort of thrown together with someone... you try to adapt like them, so I don't know" (Philips, 1997, p. 128). This suggests that she either does not trust her capacity for independent thought or that she feels that she must get along with others in order to maintain the status quo. Conversely, Hannah shows deeper insight when she is asked how she navigates her Jewish difference in a predominantly Christian culture. She says, “I guess there are times when it [being Jewish] affected my life more and times when it didn’t. Like, you know, every year around Chanukah and Christmas, I felt really like this is so ridiculous” (Philips, 1997, p. 237). Hannah’s response indicates that her otherness impacts how she relates to the culture around her. However, she does not let it impact her sense of self. Philips attributes Hannah’s use of “I don’t know” as a sign of strength, rather than weakness, to bring the interviewer into the conversation. This “differs significantly from the nice, selfless, voiceless European-American girls” (Philips, 1997, p. 237).

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[63] Annie Rogers (1993) identified this term in her essay on girls and voice. She also contributed to Voice Centered research and observed that many girls lost their sense of courage when they entered adolescence. I reference it here because Philips uses it in her article.

Clark (2000) built upon Philips’ (1997) study through her own research with Jewish girls and voice. She interviewed four White Jewish girls who lived in New England and participated in Jewish communities through synagogues and/or day schools. She asked each participant to share an example of when she advocated for herself or spoke her mind, even if what she had to say was controversial or went against popular opinion. One girl described how she confronted her coach because she felt that she was being treated unfairly, while another girl spoke about a time when she defended a peer who was being teased. Clark attributed the girls’ assertiveness to their identification with difference and the strength they derived from their Jewish communities. To this point, one participant remarked that she felt more “like herself” when she transferred from her public school to a Jewish day school, which suggests that she felt a sense of belonging or “shared culture” with her peers on account of their Jewish difference (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1991; Phinney, 1993). Clark attributed the girls’ relational competence to their Jewishness.

While illustrative, neither Clark’s (2000) nor Philips’ (1997) findings can be generalized due to their small sample sizes, the lack of intra-group diversity (all participants were White, middle-class, and engaged with non-observant Jewish communities), and the amount of time that has elapsed since the research was conducted. However, they suggest that Jewish identification can act as a protective layer to insulate girls against the challenges of adolescence. Unfortunately, this "difference" tends to be overlooked since Judaism and ways of understanding it are typically not included in the literature on girls' development. This creates limited opportunities for understanding the particular strengths and challenges they navigate in their daily lives.

While contemporary girls' studies research tends to highlight girls' voices rather than search for them (Bernier & Winstanley, 2021), it would be interesting to know whether these findings apply to contemporary Jewish girls and if and how they vary among girls from different racial, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic groups. This work could also be expanded by examining how girls relate to voice across different relationships and whether it changes in Jewish versus non-Jewish settings, such as Jewish camp, sports teams, or school. It would also be interesting to understand how girls experience voice in individual versus group settings, depending on who they are with. These questions are appropriate to the current sociohistorical moment given that girls and their peers may hear Antisemitic slurs and comments about Israel, both in person and online, that can make them uncomfortable. They may feel compelled to speak up or, conversely, afraid to draw attention to themselves. These issues are unique to Jewish individuals and are worth exploring given their relevance in young people's lives today.

Theran (2009) measured how ethnicity, gender role socialization, and parental attachment affected girls' relationship to voice. Her sample, which consisted of 108 14-year-old girls from a racially and socioeconomically diverse sample in the Midwest, provides a useful example.[64] In her findings, girls of color showed consistently high levels of voice with friends and authority figures, whereas White girls exhibited lower confidence in school. She attributed this to an internalized loss of confidence that White girls learn through the process of socialization. Given that she did not include religion as an identity category, it was unclear whether Jewish girls were involved in this study. However, her model offers a useful framework for thinking about ways to examine how Jewish girls use their voices across different contexts and ways to compare their development against other populations.

Girl-Centered Research. In recent years, Jewish girls have begun to gain visibility through girl-centered initiatives that are facilitated by Jewish feminist organizations. Notably, many of these programs are funded and/or seeded by women who have contributed to the Jewish feminist movement in America. While these programs typically reach small pockets of girls who are already engaged in Jewish life and community and who are engaged in social activism and progressive causes, they raise important visibility about their lives and use a strength-based approach to amplify their voices.

Some of these include *Jgirls Magazine*, an online magazine where Jewish girls ages 13 and older can contribute content on topics ranging from race, spirituality, politics, and sexual identity. The magazine's editorial board consists of girls who are juniors and seniors in high school. The Jewish Women's Archive's *Rising Voices* fellowship provides high school girls with a space to blog about a range of social justice issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, feminism, and abortion. Moving Traditions' *Kol Koleinu* fellowship brings high school girls together to bring change to their communities through social justice projects. Lastly, and perhaps most noteworthy, is Ma'yan's Research Training Internship (RTI), a PAR-based program that ran from 2009-2016 (the organization has since dissolved), where New York area high school girls worked with Ma'yan staff to conduct inquiries on issues that impacted their lives and produce deliverables to share these findings.

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[64] Thirty-seven percent of participants were White, 31% were Black, 4% were biracial, 11% were Latina, 4% were Asian-American, and 3% were Native-American. Theran (2009) determined girls' socioeconomic status by asking about their parents' highest level of education completed and the number of parents who lived in the home.

In 2014, The Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago (JUF) partnered with Ma'yan and the Beck Research Initiative for Women, Gender, and Community at Purdue University to bring RTI to their community. As of 2021, the initiative had completed its seventh cycle of research and programming. While the majority of RTI participants are White, middle-class, cisgender girls who engage with Jewish communities in typical ways, including camps, youth groups, day schools, and synagogues, their research signals distinct and important themes that specifically impact the lives of Jewish girls. These include Antisemitism, Israel, and the desire to talk about Jewish difference. Alongside these findings, other research indicates that Jewish girls also struggle with issues around mental health, body image, sexual consent, and perfectionism, or the need to meet the expectations of others. What makes this work particularly unique is that it is grounded in a Jewish, girl-centered, feminist perspective where the inquiries are generated by Jewish girls, who also drive the analysis process.

These collective resources provide a unique perspective for understanding how this group of Jewish girls makes sense of their multiple identities. Their findings are described in the sections below.

Antisemitism. Girls repeatedly report on the prevalence of Antisemitism in their schools and in public spaces, such as shopping malls or when they are with friends (Bakal et al., 2015;

Benjamin & Gordon, 2008; Catlett et al., 2019; Gold, 2012).[65] They also have difficulty distinguishing between "casual" Antisemitism and a joke, or what would be regarded as a microaggression by some in today's environment (Benjamin & Gordon, 2008). One RTI group asked 187 of their peers (ages 12 to 20) about their experiences with Antisemitism. They found that 44% of participants experienced Antisemitism in the form of hurtful comments and name-calling from friends and peers (Bakal et al., 2015). One girl mentioned, "Sometimes I will do something, and somebody will make some Jewish stereotypical comment. They mean it to be funny, and to inflict no harm, but it often comes across to me as rude and it makes me uncomfortable" (Bakal et al., 2015, p. 10). While almost two-thirds of participants (63%) felt that non-Jewish friends were "tolerant" of their religion, almost one quarter (23.5%) experienced Antisemitic treatment from friends, and another 9.4% were undecided. While the numbers represent one particular subset of girls, they could be larger given that Antisemitism is not treated with the same weight as other forms of oppression.[66] Beck (1983), speaking to Antisemitism's ambiguous foothold in the taxonomy of discrimination, notes:

> One of the ways Antisemitism operates is to make the Jew feel that it is not OK to talk about Antisemitism *in and of itself* and it is not ok to talk about it in the same breath as racism. Antisemitism thus falls between the cracks. (p. 11)

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[65] While girls did not report whether or not they attend Jewish day schools or non-Jewish day schools, it can be inferred that this data reflects the experiences of girls who do not attend Jewish day schools.

[66] Branfman (2019) writes that Antisemitism has not been embraced as a form of oppression by activists on the far-left. Moreover, many schools do not include it in lessons about discrimination. As a result, few people other than Jews see it as a serious issue.

Beck was referring to many feminists' refusal to acknowledge Antisemitism as a valid form of oppression in the women's movement in the 1970s and 1980s. Many Jewish women felt alienated from the movement, particularly since women with other marginalized identities' needs were being centered. She recalls how the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) only added Antisemitism to the list of many-isms it opposed by including "Arabs and Jews" to its statement as a means to distance itself from Israel (Beck, 1988).[67]

Girls may also internalize these stereotypes for themselves. In Ma'yan's 2008 study with a national sample of 227 Jewish girls (also referenced in the following sections), more than half of the participants (53%) believed that there was "some layer of truth to certain stereotypes about Jews" (Benjamin & Gordon, 2008). One girl in the 2008 Ma'yan study explained, "I DEFINITELY agree with the stereotype about education. Jews are definitely more willing to spend money on education, so they tend to achieve higher positions – "SOMETIMES, (p. 23)" which is based on the presupposition that a person has money in the first place. What complicates matters is that stereotypes often have some basis in fact. In this case, it is certainly true that Jews as a group are wealthier than almost every other group in American society, even if there are still many poor and working-class Jews. These factors can limit how girls make sense of their identities and the meanings they ascribe to being Jewish. Moreover, they can also isolate Jewish peers who fall outside of these norms. Myrika Campbell-Blue (2020), a contributor to *Jgirls Magazine,* describes how her family's experience with poverty, brought on by her mother's ovarian cancer, made her feel alienated from her middle-class Jewish community:

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[67] The NWSA added Antisemitism to the list of issues it opposes in the early 1980s, after it was ratified several times.

> Being poor and Jewish has limited me from being able to be an active member of a synagogue, participating in pricey community activities, and connecting with my peers and fellow Jews…. My friends all went to the same Jewish day school, went to the same camp in Vermont during the summer, and all thought I wasn't as Jewish as they were and pitied me for it. (paras. 3 & 4)

Herein lies an important opportunity to address the influence of class and its impact on identity, since it can promote negative stereotypes and limit the development of critical consciousness in girls and their ability to examine these constructs for themselves (Freire, 1970).

Gold (2012), who conducted longitudinal research on the impact of Antisemitism on girls' mental health over a three-year period, found that while these experiences can build their resilience, their mental health can also become compromised as their understanding and awareness of their own vulnerability grows.[68] Recent events show that girls' concerns are warranted; while Antisemitism and anti-Israel activism have been present on schoolgrounds and college campuses, Bauer-Wolf (2018) reports an uptick in Antisemitic events since 2016, as evidenced by increased propaganda against Jews, destruction of Jewish property, and the rendering of swastikas in (Jewish and non-Jewish) schools, synagogues, and other Jewish institutions (Bauer-Wolf, 2018; Jaschik, 2018). Most of this data was collected in 2015, before the Trump administration came into office.

More than one-third of participants (35.3%) in the 2015 RTI study also revealed that they were strongly concerned about the presence of Antisemitism and Boycott and Divestment Sanctions against Israel (BDS) on college campuses. Almost one quarter (22.8%) reported that this could factor into the colleges they choose to attend (see Bakal et al., 2015).[69] The girls asked for support from educators and administrators to help them process these incidents. They "recommend[ed] that educators, parents, and other mentors listen to and allow Jewish teen women to talk freely about their concerns regarding Antisemitism and other oppressions they may feel in their lives" (Bakal et al., 2015, p. 21). This suggests that these topics are worthy of further exploration with girls.

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[68] Participants in Gold's study were ages 10 to 12, and they resided in the Greater Toronto area. They represented a variety of Jewish affiliations, ranging from Orthodox to non-affiliated.

Perfectionism and Achievement. Other topics that appear frequently in Jewish girl-centered research include perfectionism and the "culture of achievement." It is important to review the chronology of this literature, since it reveals how girls understand themselves and how others perceive them.[70]

Ma'yan's national climate survey, *Pretty Soon, We'll Be Taking Over*, was one the first national surveys to examine the lives of contemporary Jewish girls.[71] The authors noted that while girls were proud to be Jewish, "girls perceive[d] themselves as constantly scrutinized by adults and peers alike: for their appearance, their generosity and 'niceness,' their academic achievements, their performance of Jewish identity" (Benjamin & Gordon, 2008, p. 9).[72] Altman et al.'s (2016) RTI-based research, *Nice Jewish Girls: So What If We Aren't Perfect?*

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[69] Participants were not asked their political opinions about Israel. This data was collected before the rise of TikTok and Instagram (see Rosenblatt, 2020).

[70] The last time "perfectionism" or "achievement" appeared as a primary research topic among RTI girls was in 2018, when they explored body image.

[71] More than 100 girls who were between the ages of 13 and 19 completed the survey. The majority of participants are affiliated with Judaism through synagogues, camps, youth groups, and/or day schools.

[72] These research findings provided the springboard for the RTI fellowship.

corroborated these findings. The majority of participants, 291 in total, felt constrained to meet the image of the “Perfect Jewish girl”, who they described as “nice, obedient, dresses modestly, performs well in school, is interested in Judaism, and marries a ‘Nice Jewish Boy’” (p. 13). One girl reported, “The Perfect Jewish Girl tries in school but later on in life will put family first, which is extremely ridiculous” (Altman et al., 2016, p. 13), reflecting an internalized sense of resignation or rejection of this reality.

These findings suggest that social constructions of White, middle-class Jewish girlhood add an important yet relatively unexplored layer of complexity to Jewish girls’ identity development, such as the need to date Jewish, to participate in Jewish community, to present as heterosexual and thin, and to serve others (Altman et al., 2016; Bakal et al., 2015; Benjamin & Gordon, 2008; Fishman, 2000). A national study conducted by the Jewish youth organization B’nai Brith Youth Organization (BBYO, 2008) found that Jewish girls dedicated more time to academic study and Jewish activities than their male counterparts, which suggests that they place a higher premium on personal achievement and accountability than their male peers (Benjamin & Gordon, 2008; BBYO, 2008; Sales et al., 2011). According to True Child (2017), “the need to always be perfect, to always succeed, can make Jewish girls feel like they always need to be ‘on’” (p. 7). In the Ma’yan study, Benjamin and Gordon (2008) note that Jewish girls are a “thriving” population who require ongoing support from parents and caring adults to dismantle the culture of perfectionism.

However, subsequent research conducted by the 2016 RTI cohort found a disconnect between girls’ and parents’ perceptions of their socioemotional health. Specifically, girls asked, “What messages, pressures, and expectations do Jewish teen girls receive about what is valued as 'normal?'" (Altman et al., 2016, p. 4).[73] Parents' responses surprised girls in many ways. For example, 45% of daughters indicated that their parents would not support them if they were in a same-sex relationship. One girl responded, "They would kick me out of the house or worse" (p. 8). However, 65% of parents said that they would stand by their daughters. The majority of girls (90%) feared that their parents would reject them if they were in a relationship with a non-Jew. However, 50% of parents indicated that they would be "very supportive" if this were the case. While these findings represent a slice of the Jewish population (predominantly White, middle-class, non-Orthodox girls from the metropolitan Chicago area), they play an important role in disrupting long-held expectations placed on Jewish girls and creating new possibilities for interpreting their lives. This reinforces the need to examine how gender expectations impact Jewish girls' development and why studying their lives matters.

Despite the many promising revelations afforded by this study, parents missed important aspects that affected their daughters' wellbeing, particularly when it came to mental health. In one example, 43% of girls reported that they suffered from depression. However, only 17% of parents believed this to be the case.[74] Altman et al. (2016) concluded that "parents on average don't perceive their daughters as struggling" (p. 9). This could indicate a need for improved communication between parents and daughters around mental health care or a discrepancy between how girls experience mental health and how their parents perceive it. Conversely, it could also be that some girls felt momentary sadness and/or distress when they completed the survey or that they hid their symptoms from their parents.[75]

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[73] Participant-researchers interviewed 103 Jewish girls and 62 parents.

[74] The study was conducted before the COVID-19 epidemic, a time during which many teens' mental health needs skyrocketed. These rates are not reflected in these numbers.

While norms and attitudes around perfectionism and achievement do not reflect the experiences of all Jewish girls, they deserve further consideration given that girls tend to raise these topics when they are given the space (see Helmley, 2019). If left unattended, they could pose serious consequences for girls' ability to resist them. While these images are changing, particularly as Jewish girls "talk back" to these rigid norms and claim power for themselves, they can impede girls' ability to cultivate an independent voice and sense of self. This indicates a need to work in partnership with girls to challenge and dismantle these norms, as well as to interrogate the conditions that give rise to them.

Jewishness. Girls also report that Judaism plays an important role in the formation of their identities. Fishman and Parmer (2008) note, "Nationally, girls and women outnumber men in weekly non-Orthodox worship services, in adult education classes, in volunteer leadership positions, and in Jewish cultural events" (p. 1). For example, in the 2020–2021 academic year, the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion enrolled 203 female students versus 132 male students. (UnivStats, n.d.), which reflects a recent trend of female dominance in liberal seminaries (Pine, 2016). Whitehead-Bust (2010) also found that Jewish girls' rates of participation in religious and communal activities exceeded those of boys'.

At the same time, gender disparities can impact how Jewish girls relate to this aspect of their identity. In Benjamin and Gordon's (2008) aforementioned study on Jewish girls, 80%

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[75] By mid-adolescence, girls are more than twice as likely to experience depression than boys, with estimates between 14 and 20 percent (Steingard, 2021).

indicated that they were proud to be Jewish.[76] While 79% of girls participated in community service activities and activism, almost half attributed this work to an extension of their Jewish values. Some of the causes they were committed to included poverty and hunger (54%), children's issues (48%), activities related to Israel (45%), and women's and reproductive rights (19%). The authors also noted that girls' connections to Judaism were both personal and community oriented. Girls demonstrated their commitment to this identity by wearing Jewish symbols such as *hamsas* and jewelry with Stars of David, participating in Jewish activities, and studying Jewish texts. One girl mentioned that she felt lucky to be part of "a Jewish community that is thousands of years old" (Benjamin & Gordon, 2008, p. 16), while another shared her appreciation for Israel. "I go to yeshiva, and I love Israel so much" (Benjamin & Gordon, 2008, p. 16).

Girls also derived meaning from being Jewish by celebrating holidays with family and friends. Twenty percent of Benjamin & Gordon's (2008) participants also declared that they were more observant than their parents. They claimed that to maintain stricter practice around dietary laws, they had to pray more frequently and attend worship services more often than their parents, an anomalous finding for non-Orthodox girls. Interestingly, participants' relationship to prayer (35%) did not correlate with their belief in God (48%). That is, one did not have to pray frequently to believe in God. This statistic makes Jewish girls very different from their Christian counterparts.[77] Less than half of the girls surveyed indicated that they believed in God. This is consistent with Smith and Denton’s (2005) findings that today’s youth are driven to explore “a multiplicity of truths'” rather than one specific religion (p. 27). In a piece for *Jgirls Magazine,* Sammi Reyes (2019) writes, “As my identity develops, I constantly question Judaism and the relevance of God and the mitzvot—commandments—in my life and our history. Are we obligated to worship a higher figure? What is the purpose of these actions?” (para.1). This suggests that girls need additional opportunities where they can explore the spiritual dimensions of their lives.

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[76] Of the girls surveyed, 38% identified as Reform, 28% as Conservative, and 9% as Orthodox. The remaining girls identified as "just Jewish," Reconstructionist, or "other."

[77] According to Smith and Denton (2005), 72% of Jewish teens ages 13–17 believe in God, compared to 94% of Christian youth.

While girls’ religious engagement has been linked with positive self-esteem, it can also serve as a source of struggle as girls attempt to locate themselves within the context of religion (Carlson et al., 2000; Dubow et al., 2000; Markstrom et al., 1998; Stolz et al., 2013). Heschel (1991) notes that “the role differentiation between women and men is not without clear value assignment in traditional Judaism” (p. 33). While Judaism is in many ways an ever-evolving faith, some girls face barriers to accessing their full agency when it comes to ritual and tradition, particularly within traditional forms of Judaism. Abigail Fisher, who was raised Orthodox, identifies these challenges in *The Oxymoron of Jewish Feminism,* where she discusses her desire to wear *tefillin,* or phylacteries, ritual wear traditionally worn by Jewish men.[78] Fisher writes, “The tension became clear: how could I honor a tradition that did not make space for me as a female?” (2016, para 1). It is important to learn more about the complexity of girls’ experiences so that they are able to claim space for themselves within the tradition.

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[78] This is a blog post she wrote as a Jewish Women’s Archive *Rising Voices* fellow.

Modesty and Dress. In a 2021 RTI report, participants discuss how they relate to Jewish *mitzvot* (commandments) around modesty, which apply to many traditional Jews (Altman et al., 2021). Alison disagrees with them on the grounds that they are discriminatory toward women.

> I mean, I don't agree with any of the [rules]. I find them kind of sexist, especially due to the fact that if you follow strict Judaic modesty rules, women aren't allowed to even wear pants. I feel like they contribute to a society in which we force modesty and don't allow people to have pride in their bodies. I mean, for some people, modesty can be empowering because they have control over their body and can control how much they want to show. But for me personally, it took me a while to feel comfortable with my body. And so, I don't like it when modesty is forced on me. I want to be able to dress how I want and not worry that someone else is going to say, "you're dressed inappropriately, so cover up!" (p. 8)

Alison renders these rules as a form of body shaming since they ultimately deny Jewish girls and women decision-making over their bodies. She feels that *tsniut*, or modesty, can be empowering if girls and/or women choose it for themselves, but not when it is forced upon them. Other girls explain that their family's "dress code" reflects "universal" values rather than Jewish values. Ali S. explains:

> I wasn't raised with any modesty standards that were specifically religion related. My parents were not super huge on crop tops and stuff like that. They still aren't. My sister and I try to push back on that as much as we can. But it was never really a Jewish thing; it was more of a societal thing. (Altman et al., 2021, p. 9)

At the same time, girls are increasingly aware of the ways in which girls' bodies are read and sexualized in Jewish contexts. A recent RTI survey (see Altman et al., 2021) conducted among

47 Jewish girls in Chicago found that 50% of participants felt that Jewish girls' bodies were sexualized and objectified through restrictive dress codes and unchecked hook-up culture in Jewish summer camps, day schools, and youth groups. Fifty-three percent of girls also shared that they refrained from purchasing items that they liked for fear of coming across as immodest or "hypersexual," which suggests that girls are concerned about how their bodies are being read by others.

Girls' experiences with and expressions of Jewish identity— all generated by girl-centered research initiatives— contradict research findings that indicate lower rates of religious identification among Jewish youth (see Pew Research Center, 2013, 2020).[79] While the girls represent a small subset of the entire population of Jewish American girls, understanding their experiences is a worthwhile endeavor, given that Jewish girls will encounter new growth, struggles, and challenges as they continue to carve out their religious identities and traditions in an assimilated, imbalanced world. Future research initiatives should work with Jewish girls from a strength-based approach to better understand what religion means to them and the barriers they face in meeting their religious and spiritual needs in a meaningful way. While this research provides an overview of issues experienced by girls who are already engaged in Jewish life, it is important to identify those experienced by girls who do not participate in Jewish life and who exist on the fringes of it to ensure that girls of all ethnicities, races, and religious affiliations are centered.

Research on Girls by Jewish Organizations. Understandings of Jewish girls are also enhanced by data from Jewish organizations. They typically assess girls' participation and satisfaction with Jewish identity-building programs, such as camps, informal education, and youth groups (see Kadushin et al., 2000; Whitehead-Bust, 2010; Woocher et al., 2015). These findings largely serve the agendas of researchers and funders who maintain a narrow and myopic view of what the Jewish community should be like and look like.[80] Gender is not typically regarded as an important variable of analysis, resulting in a fundamental loss in what can be discovered about Jewish girls' lives (Weiner, 2019).

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[79] Other Jewish education researchers have also lent their perspectives to this issue, with mixed feelings and responses (see Bahr, 2021; Bryfman, 2020).

This is exemplified through Schwadel's (2006) summary of the 2003 National Study of Youth and Religion survey, which asks American teens about their attitudes and beliefs about religion.[81] In his analysis of Jewish teens' responses, he observed that "the desire to marry Jews and raise Jewish children emerged as a significant expression of Jewish identity among the teens surveyed" (Schwadel, 2006, p. 141). Furthermore, a number of Jewish girls reported that their mothers advised them to marry a Jew because it would be "easier," whereas "some Jewish boys also spoke about the importance of the Jewish family" (p. 141). While this could suggest that boys and girls experienced different pressures and motivations to marry a Jewish spouse, he did not interpret this data through a gender-based perspective; rather, he did not elaborate on it at all.

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[80] For example, in their article How Jewish Academia Created a #Metoo Disaster, Berman et al. (2018) explain how Jewish academia has long privileged topics that were of interest to men. This enabled them to advance their interests and subvert those that were valued by women and minorities, particularly regarding identity politics.

[81] The 2003 National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) assessed patterns of religious engagement, belief, and fidelity among a nationally representative sample of 3,290 teenagers ages 13–17 in the United States. The survey used random-digit dialing to recruit participants. The study oversampled 80 Jewish families to obtain more accurate information. This brought the total number of cases in the study to 3,370. Parents also participated in the survey.

Given the pressure that some Jewish girls experience to "perform" a Jewish identity, it would have been worthwhile to examine how it fits into the larger narrative of Jewish girls' experiences. At the same time, this survey is almost 20 years old. The youth were older millennials, and not from Gen Z. To give a sense of the cultural shift since the survey was taken, these respondents went through their teen years without Facebook or iPhones.

Data also shows that Jewish girls who participate in Jewish programs and activities are better able to navigate relationships and advocate for themselves. This can be attributed to the mentoring relationships, values-based education, and caring communities they derive from these spaces (The Jewish Education Project & Rosov Consulting, 2016; Kress, 2013). In a *Jgirls Magazine* article, S. M. (2017) shares how she felt safe exploring her sexual identity at camp:

> The only way I can describe how it feels to be in a bunk is by describing the mutual trust and respect and pure love we felt for the bodies around us, enough to entrust them with our own— the most honest, exposed, parts of ourselves, and the parts that we sometimes thought were ugly. (para. 3)

Her passage suggests that she was able to deepen her own self-understanding through the relationships she built with her peers. The process of allowing oneself to be fully seen is echoed through Hill's (2017) previously referenced concept of *embodied vulnerability,* which she describes as "the intentional practice of offering the body up as a tool in a dialogic process intended to incite critical, personal, and collective reflection" (p. 7).[82] While Hill's concept has not been examined in Jewish contexts, some scholars, including Milligan (2019), have developed possibilities for Jewish feminist bodily liberation. This includes challenging outdated and/or exclusive practices, adapting them to fit the current needs and realities of girls and women, and inventing new policies and traditions to meet the needs of an ever-changing society. Milligan claims that by adopting these practices, “they [Jewish environments] demonstrate that all bodies are, indeed, welcome, even if they have not yet arrived in the space” (2019, p. 48).

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[82] Hill, a Black queer professor and artist, developed this pedagogy to invite her students to name the assumptions they held about her Black queer body.

However, many Jewish institutions, including camps, day schools, and youth groups, are unable to provide girls with a safe and equitable environment due to a lack of discourse around homophobia, mental health, transphobia, consent, sexual harassment, bullying, and body shaming. These are detailed in the 2008 report, *Evaded Issues in Jewish Education: A Resource Guide for Jewish Educators*,[83] which was commissioned by the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), the Conservative movement’s seminary in the United States. In its contents, the authors describe the ongoing failure of Jewish educators and the institutions behind them to implement curriculum and train on issues that impact Jewish girls’ social and emotional wellbeing. Some of these include sexual harassment and discrimination, gender and sexual identity, body image and eating disorders, and strategies for engaging in healthy relationships (Epstein et al., 2007). They also offer a number of curricular resources to assist them in this endeavor. While the report was widely disseminated among Jewish educational researchers and practitioners (it was archived for several years on the Berman Jewish Policy Archive, Stanford University’s Open Access library), its impact remains unknown, as it has not been referenced in subsequent literature.

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[83] In their report, the authors found that many Jewish organizations and institutions are ill-equipped to deal with issues affecting teens, particularly girls, such as bullying, sexual harassment, and eating disorders. They draw from the AAUW’s 1992 goals to turn classrooms into places where students can share experiences from their daily lives.

In recent years, perhaps due to the national reckoning that came with the #Metoo movement, Jewish summer camps, youth groups, and day schools have come under increased pressure, often at the behest of girls, parents, and staff, to address issues around sexual harassment, gender inclusivity, and consent within these environments (see Braff, 2019; Dreyfus, 2018, 2019). While many of these issues are endemic of those within the larger society, they can shape and influence girls' experience in Jewish environments. Girls have spoken up about toxic hook-up cultures and sexual harassment they have endured at Jewish youth groups and camps, with limited consequence for perpetrators (see Braff, 2019; Dreyfus, 2018, 2019). Rather, they have experienced cultures that reward and encourage these behaviors (Dreyfus, 2018).

Mahrer (2021), a former camper, counselor, and youth group member, describes the pain and confusion she felt from believing that she had no choice but to participate in her camp's "point" system. "Hook-ups" were allotted a different number of points based on who the act was with and the act(s) that occurred. Counselors either looked away or encouraged this behavior.[84] Mahrer (2021) notes, "According to our point system, I wasn't worth much on my own, but every kiss, every blowjob, every sexual encounter with someone who was worth more than me increased my value" (para. 2). Looking back on this experience, she wishes that "they felt more like empowering choices and less like required currency" (para. 12). In response to the negative publicity, several leading organizations, including the North American Federation for Temple Youth (NFTY), Moving Traditions, and Jewish Women International, have spearheaded initiatives to prevent sexual harassment and assault and to teach informed sex education to Jewish teens and their staff.

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[84] Peers incurred points after engaging in sexual acts with one another. People were assigned different values based on their role within the organization and the sexual acts they performed.

One of these organizations is the Foundation for Jewish Camp, whose *Shmira* Initiative trains Jewish camp providers to extinguish toxic behaviors at camp (Dolsten, 2018). Jeremy Fingerman, CEO of the Foundation for Jewish Camping, notes:

> Summer camps are a prime place to begin to change gender norms, to create partners and allies for boys and young men... in some sense these camps are an incubator of what the next generation of what Jewish communal leaders will be, and our young people really have the power to shift culture and to influence change. (Dolsten, 2018, para. 8)

BBYO and NFTY, two of the leading Jewish youth movements, have acted along similar lines and have developed training series to educate staff and teens about consent, relationship safety, and respect for all genders (see Mendelsohn, 2020; Mosbacher, 2021).[85] Many of these programs are created and facilitated by teens. While these initiatives are commendable, their novelty suggests that Jewish girls are still being acculturated in environments where they are at risk of sexual harassment and sexual objectification, which deprive girls of the ability to engage in healthy sexual exploration and to make empowered decisions for themselves (Lamb & Peterson, 2012).

Recently, Jewish girls, many of whom are products of Jewish feminist programs, expressed a newfound demand for change and accountability from the Jewish communities they identify with. One example is Jewish Teens for Empowered Consent (JTEC), a girl-centered initiative that emerged from participants of the Jewish Women's Archive's *Rising Voices Fellowship*. Frustrated by the unchecked and pervasive culture of heteronormativity, sexual harassment, and pressure to hook up that they and their peers experienced at the hands of Jewish youth groups, camps, and schools, they shared their sentiments through a widely syndicated letter in *eJewish Philanthopy*, an online newsletter that is widely read by Jewish educators, communal professionals, researchers, and philanthropists (Canfield et al., 2020). The authors share a:

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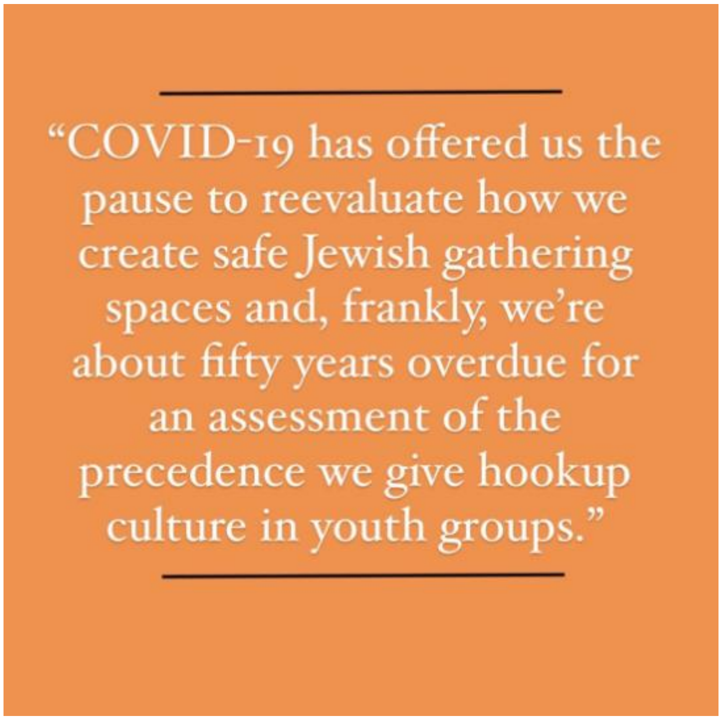
[85] Many, if not all, of their camps receive support and guidance from the Foundation for Jewish Camp.

> Hop[e] to raise consciousnesses in the tradition of our Jewish feminist foremothers because we recognize the value of youth groups to our continuity, so long as they shift their purpose from Jewish coupling to fostering vibrant Jewish engagement at large. (para. 14)

In addition to juggling busy high school and college schedules, the girls were asked to develop curriculum and training for youth groups around issues of consent and understanding. The teen leaders also maintain an active Instagram page, where they encourage followers to post about their experiences with sexual trauma and sexual harassment in youth group settings and beyond. An example is provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Jewish Teens for Empowered Consent Instagram Post



"COVID-19 has offered us the pause to reevaluate how we create safe Jewish gathering spaces and, frankly, we're about fifty years overdue for an assessment of the precedence we give hookup culture in youth groups."

Note. Adapted from Jewish Teens for Empowered Consent (2020).

This initiative is an important example of Jewish girls stepping into power and demanding social change.

Many other programs, such as Jewish Children and Family Service of Boston's Teen Safe program, encourage girls to explore themes around relationship safety and serve as peer advocates for teens in their communities. Benjamin and Gordon (2008) claim that, given their relative relationship to power, it is important to invest in Jewish American girls' socially responsible and competent leadership so that they can become empowered leaders.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of girls' studies in terms of its origins, its initial questions, the history of the field, and how it became specialized over time. I provided an overview of how research was conducted first about girls and then with girls to better understand the complexities of their lives. I also provided an overview of the existing research on Jewish girls. I explained where they are talked about, how they are talked about, which girls are talked about, and how research on and with Jewish girls has been impacted by girls' studies research. I also revealed the gaps in the literature.

The paucity of research on Jewish girls' lives leaves many questions about who they are and how they construct their identities. While some of the literature positions girls as challenges to be solved, other research highlights unique aspects of their experiences, such as how girls in Hasidic and white middle-class communities construct their identities. Other research highlights the meaning girls derive from their relationship with Judaism and the unique struggles they face due to Antisemitism and perfectionism. Given that the majority of the research focuses on specific populations of Jewish girls, little is known about the experiences of other girls, including Jewish girls of color, Jewish girls who do not affiliate with religion in typical ways, Jewish girls who are interfaith, and Jewish girls who are poor, working-class, and/or lower-class. Their perspectives are important in order to get a fuller sense of who Jewish girls are and how they derive meaning from their Jewish identity.

In the next chapter, Chapter 3, I explain my research methodology, which includes the design for the study, how I recruited participants, and the process I used to analyze the data.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, I describe the nature of my inquiry, the questions that informed the study, and my approach to the research. I provide an overview of the research design and methods and the process I used to recruit participants. I explain how I analyzed the data and the ethical considerations I took into account when analyzing the data.

Research Question(s)

The goal of the research was to understand how Jewish activist girls navigate issues around racial identity, ethnic identity, sexual identity, gender identity, religious identity, Antisemitism, Israel, friendship, and Judaism in their everyday lives. I endeavored to expand understandings of Jewish girlhood beyond White, middle-class, religiously affiliated, cisgender, heterosexual Jewish girls and to examine the multiplicities of Jewish girls' lives. The primary research questions which guide this dissertation include:

RQ1: How do Jewish activist girls navigate their relationship to voice, visibility, and representation?

RQ2: What are the unique challenges experienced by Jewish girl activists?

RQ3: How do Jewish girl activists exercise resistance against the challenges they experience?

Research Approach Rationale

Qualitative Inquiry

Given that my intention was not to discover a single "truth" about Jewish girls but rather to understand their lived experiences and meaning-making, it made sense to use qualitative methods to guide my inquiry. Qualitative research is particularly suited when little is known about an issue or when researchers hope to examine it on a deeper level (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Mayan (2009) describes qualitative inquiry as a “naturalistic, interpretive, and inductive” methodology (p. 11) that considers the social, historical, and cultural contexts of individuals' lives. She claims that “by studying naturally occurring phenomena (or issues in the everyday world), qualitative researchers attempt to interpret or make sense of the meaning people attach to their experiences or underlying a particular phenomenon” (p. 11).[86] In other words, qualitative researchers aim to explain the what, how, and why of a particular event. This underscores the important role of the researcher, who is charged with the task of making sense of someone else’s experience while being situated in their own reality. I could only do this by working in partnership with girls and by examining my own relationship to the data.

Patton (2015) underscores the critical role that the researcher plays in interpreting their participants’ realities:

> The researcher is the instrument of inquiry. What brings you [the researcher] to an inquiry matters. Your background, experience, capacity for empathy, cross-cultural sensitivity, and how you, as a person, engage in field work and analysis— these things undergird the credibility of your findings. (p. 3)

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) describe the qualitative researcher as a *bricoleur*, or a quilt maker, who draws from a variety of tools, methods, and techniques to examine an issue or question. They emphasize the use of multiple methods in order to add “rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry” (p. 7). Mayan (2009) adds, “We qualitative researchers must use creativity, sensitivity, and flexibility as we try to make sense of life as it unfolds” (p. 11). Through every step of the process, the choices I made focused on how to reach Jewish teenage girls safely during the constraints of COVID-19 while capturing the complexity of their multidimensional lives. At the time, vaccines were not available, and people were encouraged to practice social distancing and to remain at home whenever possible. I had to design a study that would enable me to pursue my inquiry from a distance since it was not possible to meet with girls. I feared this would prevent me from building rapport and safe, trusting connections with girls, and that this would affect the quality of the data.

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[86] This could apply to a particular social group, such as Jewish activist girls or people who attended a concert.

Rationale for Methodology. Given that this research was of a personal nature and that relationship-building was critical, I made the decision to conduct individual interviews and focus groups with girls online using Zoom software. I also created a Google survey for participants to share demographic information in case they wanted to share anything about themselves in a written format. I had some familiarity with Zoom, having used it in my *Girlhood* class during the previous semester, and it proved to be a powerful format for students and professors alike to build knowledge in a safe and supportive environment (see Weiner et al., 2020). I decided to collect data through interviews and focus groups because I thought that the girls might be forthcoming in different ways. I was also curious to see what it would be like for Jewish activist girls to co-construct knowledge about their lives together.

Throughout the course of study, I was delighted and amazed by the ways in which girls and I were able to connect over Zoom. I got to see aspects of their lives that I would not have been able to see if we had met in person. They showed me their bedrooms, their artwork, and photographs of their friends. I heard the girls being called for dinner and their mothers interrupting them to see if they wanted something to drink. One girl showed me the “Jewish shelf” in her bedroom where she placed her kiddush cup, her candlesticks, and her menorah. Another girl gave me a tour of her artwork, which was displayed on her bedroom wall. This meeting forum gave me access to the “bedroom culture” of their lives, where many girls retreated during COVID-19 and constructed their identities (McRobbie & Garber, 1976). Meeting this way also equalized the power relationship. The girls were in an environment that was presumably comfortable for them; they spoke to me from their desks, their beds, and their kitchen tables. They also saw me in my home environment, which likely made me more familiar to them as a person. They could see pictures of my family and friends and my piles of books—the things that made me who I was. This enabled us to build a sense of intimacy despite the distance. While the screens initially felt foreign to me, I quickly realized that the girls were probably used to interacting through them, given that so many of their social interactions take place online. I was the foreigner.

Relationship Building. The pandemic proved to be a common starting point for most interviews. I asked participants about their lives, and I let them ask me about mine. In many cases, participants and I spoke about the impact of social isolation, whether or not they were attending school in person, and how they were keeping themselves grounded. Given that the girls and I were in different parts of the country, some of our experiences were different. Some of the girls lived in areas where people were taking COVID-19 precautions more seriously than others, and some of the girls were attending school in person. I was also able to share about my family’s experience with social distancing and COVID-19. This provided a nice and comfortable way to step into the interviews. In most cases, the conversation flowed, and the interviews went much longer than I thought they would— a few went over three hours! The girls seemed to appreciate having the opportunity to share their experiences with a compassionate listener. Many of them also revealed that there were few people with whom they could speak about the challenges they experienced as Jewish girl activists who were navigating multiple identities.

Throughout the research process, I asked girls how they were managing in spite of the pandemic, since many of the girls were participating in online school and isolated from friends. While I was initially concerned as to whether I would be able to build meaningful connections with participants, these fears were quickly allayed. Many of the girls were hungry for companionship during COVID-19 and eager to talk about their experiences. In the majority of cases, I was able to establish rapport rather quickly with the girls. They seemed genuinely interested in my dissertation topic and grateful that I was interested in learning about their lives. I also got the impression that they wanted to talk about some of the challenges that they were facing, whether it had to do with tensions around race, Israel, religious identity, or their sexuality. While only half of the participants joined in the focus groups, in all cases (there were four), the girls seemed to connect with ease. Something I realized through talking with girls is that they frequently meet new people through social media, so they were not intimidated by the prospect of attending an online focus group. At the end of each focus group, the girls agreed to trade contact information. They seemed eager to stay in touch. To my knowledge, two girls have remained in touch and have visited one another. These methods proved to be an important and empowering way for Jewish activist girls to connect and build identity during a time of crisis.

Working online had other advantages; it not only enabled me to work with a more geographically diverse cross-section of girls, but it also allowed for more flexible scheduling. I was able to meet with girls after school, in the evenings, and on Sundays. I also did not have to travel to meet them or worry about finding a convenient and private meeting space. Most activities were at a standstill, so it was easy to schedule interviews around the girls' school commitments. However, as pandemic restrictions began to ease in April 2021 and the weather also began to improve in most parts of the country, it became harder to recruit girls for focus groups. The scheduling time also coincided with school graduations and other end of year commitments. The fact that girls were in different time zones also proved a challenge, since girls on the West Coast could not accommodate an early start time to accommodate girls on the East Coast during the school week.

Grounded Theory

I used grounded theory that was informed by a feminist approach to guide my inquiry. Grounded theory is particularly useful when little is known about a phenomenon at hand, such as how Jewish activist girls navigate their identities. Theory is generated from the “ground up”. This made sense when working with Jewish girls, whose voices and experiences have been precluded from the production of knowledge.

With grounded theory, data are systematically coded and analyzed against one another until a theory or theories begin(s) to emerge (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994; Strauss, 1987). Strauss and Corbin (1994) note, “Each concept earns its way into the theory by *repeatedly* being present in interviews, documents, and observations in one form or another— or by being significantly absent” (p. 7). Creswell (2013) explains that “a grounded theory study has ‘movement’ or some action that the researcher is attempting to explain” (p. 85). In this way, the theory came from my interpretation of the girls’ words, expressions, and opinions. It made sense to use grounded theory since the goal of the study was to contribute to a new area of knowledge: how Jewish activist girls, a largely under-researched population, navigate issues around Antisemitism, Israel, and religious identity alongside the typical challenges of adolescence, such as mental health, relationships, stress, sexual identity, and body image. This methodology would also ensure that the girls’ voices were included in the theory that emerged.

Grounded Theory and Feminism

Grounded theory has been interpreted as a feminist method due to its emphasis on researcher reflexivity, theory development, situatedness, and post-structuralism (see Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2003, 2015; Star, 2007). This literature was helpful to me as I considered my relationship with the girls and the scholarship I hoped to produce. In the case of the study, I held power over the girls. Yet we were also situated in a society where knowledge produced by Jewish girls and women is undervalued.

Charmaz (2006) emphasizes that the researcher is an author, or co-participant, in their research rather than a neutral observer. Her critique rests on the epistemological and ontological frameworks that foreground grounded theory, which she maintains are influenced by positivism and the existence of an external reality. Her constructivist approach "highlights the flexibility of the method and resists mechanical applications of it" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 13). She asserts that a constructivist method resists these frameworks, noting that "the social locations of both the interviewer and the interviewee matter" (p. 74). In this way, the theory that emerges is personally, socially, and culturally situated. It was therefore important for me to think about the privilege and power I held over the girls, particularly since this was "my" project. I did not want them to think that I expected a particular "truth" from them.[87] Rather, I hoped that we could engage in a process of co-construction together, where we could build off of one another's wisdom and generate new ideas together.

Maynard (1994) describes the process of co-construction as one that has the "potential to resituate those residing in the margins, bringing them into the centre of knowledge produced about (by) them" (p. 10). This process is viewed as political since it foregrounds the production of knowledge in an ethic of care (Rutstein-Riley & Ziergiebel, 2018). I began each interview by letting the girls know that I was interested in hearing what they had to say and that I was not fishing for answers. I told them that the goal of the project was to help others learn about their lived experiences as Jewish girl activists, given that their experiences are rarely written about and because they had important knowledge to share.

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[87] I initially had an identity map activity, but I removed this from the analysis process because only a few girls completed it.

That said, I was concerned about misrepresenting participants' lives and their words. Both Star (2007) and Clarke (2015) have weighed in on the vulnerability and humility required on behalf of the researcher when it comes to representing other people's experiences. Whereas Star describes theory development as a subjective experience of both "attachment and separation" (p. 83), Clarke (2015) states this is both a deconstructive and reflexive process, since "there is no one right reading…all readings are temporary, partial, provisional, and perspectival— themselves situated historically and geographically" (p. 126). She further notes, "The analyst is constantly banging into and bouncing off the interpretations of others" (p. 126). I found myself returning to the data several times to ensure that I adequately understood what the girls said and interpreted their experiences in the way that they intended. Miles et al. (2014) note that "coding *is* analysis" (p. 4). This was a particularly onerous task given the sheer amount of data that I collected from the girls. The stories that they shared were personal, and every detail mattered. On several occasions, I struggled over when to discard data and when to hold onto it because the girls were discussing the intricacies of their lives. I felt overwhelmed by the prospect of losing something important. At the same time, it would have been impossible to include everything that the girls shared.

I listened to the interviews and focus group recordings several times over to make sure that I accurately captured what the girls said and *how* they said it. The process of constant coding, memoing, and speaking with my advisor, Dr. Amy Rutstein-Riley, on several occasions helped to ensure that the codes I developed and the theory that emerged were structurally sound, cohesive, and reflective of the girls' experiences.

Research Design and Methods

This grounded theory study design included semi-structured interviews, surveys, and focus groups. The use of multiple methods, or triangulation, allowed for the data to be triangulated, which ensured a deep and interwoven process of data analysis. I was able to address the research questions, ensure the credibility of the data, and assess what could be learned about my dissertation topic.

This is a linear representation of the research process:

Recruitment → Screening → Consent → Interview → Survey → Focus Group

Data Collection

The study was approved by the Lesley University Institutional Review Board in January 2021. Data collection took place from January 2021 to May 2021.

Phase I: Participant Recruitment

The recruitment process was lengthy and informative. I used purposeful sampling and snowball sampling to recruit participants for the study. Purposeful sampling provides "information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (Patton, 1990, p. 169), while snowball sampling helps researchers gain access to the target population.

After I received approval from the institutional review board (IRB), I created a recruitment flyer for the study. I emailed the flyer to staff at Jewish youth-serving organizations and asked them to share it with potential participants (Appendix A). I used the following criteria to identify potential participants for the study:

- Identify as female
- Identify as Jewish
- High school student
- Live in the United States

Email. I emailed the study flyer to staff at Jewish teen-serving organizations. These included Diller Teen Fellows, Moving Traditions, B'nai B'rith Youth Organization (BBYO), The Northeast Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY), The National Council of Synagogue Youth (NCSY), The Jewish Teen Initiative of Boston, United Synagogue Youth (USY), *Jgirls Magazine*, Jewish United Fund of Chicago's Research Training Internship, Stand With Us, and The Jewish Women's Archive. These organizations serve Jewish teens who are part of the dominant, White-centered "Jewish American" landscape. Most of the teens they serve live in communities with large to medium-sized Jewish populations, such as Boston, New York, Los Angeles, Miami, Denver, and Chicago. They also tend to attract girls who affiliate with Jewish communities in typical ways.

I also reached out to organizations that serve Jews of Color, including Jewtina, which celebrates Latino-Jewish history, culture, and identity; the Jews of Color Initiative, which leverages the status of Jews of color in Jewish communal and professional communities; the Mitsui Collective, a group dedicated to promoting Jewish intersectionality and wellness; and Jews in All Hues, an education and advocacy organization that supports Jews of Color. I also contacted organizations that focus on teen activism and/or run programs for teen activists, such as Zero Climate Hour, the Sunrise Movement, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the Youth Activism Project, to ask for their help in promoting the study.

Social Media. I promoted the study using a few different social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram.

Facebook. I used Facebook in a few different ways: I posted information about the study on my personal timeline. I also messaged personal contacts who had access to Jewish teens and asked them to promote the study. Lastly, I advertised the study on private Facebook groups for Jewish educators, such as Jedlab, a group of 12,000 Jewish educators from around the world. In all instances, I made sure that I had permission from group moderators before I posted information about the study.

Instagram. My experience with Instagram was limited prior to my engagement with this research. I became increasingly aware of its popularity with teens and the need to grow my facility with it. While Instagram was essential to the recruitment process in many ways, it also offered new ways for understanding Jewish girls' self-expression and how they present their identity to others, making this fertile ground for future analysis.

***Finding Followers*.** I posted information about the study on my Instagram account. I tried to increase my followers by following Jewish youth-serving organizations and organizations that serve Jews of Color (such as the ones listed above) and hoping that they would follow me back. I also followed organizations and people who promoted causes that Jewish activist girls might identify with, such as @keshetlgbtqjews, which provides programs and resources to LGBTQ+ Jews; @standwithushs, which helps Jewish teens navigate conversations about Israel and Antisemitism; and @endantisemitism, an anonymous platform for people to share their experiences with Antisemitism. I figured that girls could learn about the study if these organizations followed me. I also followed content created by teens. Some examples include @challahbackgirls, a home-made *challah* service by four sisters who donate proceeds from their sales to organizations with anti-racist missions, and @jews4empoweredconsent, a group of six Jewish girls who work to address the toxic hook-up/sexual assault culture in Jewish youth movements and challenge the culture of silence around these issues.

Reaching out over Instagram. My strategy with these groups was twofold: I asked the moderators of these groups to promote the study. I also examined the profiles of girls in these groups. If girls met the criteria for the study and their profiles were public, I would message them and ask whether they would consider participating in the study or promote it to others. In these cases, I came up with my own strategy for screening girls.

Symbols. In many cases, girls (and all young people) list their anticipated year of high school or college graduation in their bio (a brief description of themselves that they include next to their name). This made it easy to determine who was still in high school and eligible to participate. Some girls listed where they lived or went to school, which helped to ensure geographical diversity. Finally, and most interestingly, symbols became an important way to learn basic information about girls. Many girls used a variety of symbols, such as 🔯, to denote Jewish identity; 🧿, to represent Middle Eastern identity; IL, to represent Israel or Zionism; and 🏳️, to conflate LGBTQ+ identity and/or allyship under their names. Others wrote their names in Hebrew, such as Hadar 🔯 הדר (not a participant in the study). In these cases, I assumed that they were Jewish. While this is not a study of how Jewish girls construct and reveal their identities in online spaces, the symbols they used provided an important means for identifying girls. I messaged girls who appeared to meet the study criteria and recruited many participants this way. If the girls did not respond to my first message, I did not message them again.

Direct Outreach. I learned that the best way to recruit girls is to reach out to them directly. While I was waiting for IRB approval, I compiled a list of girls who met the criteria for the study. I learned about their backgrounds, stories, and accomplishments through websites from Jewish and non-Jewish organizations, Jewish newspapers (*Forward, Times of Israel)*, and Jewish feminist magazines such as *Lilith*. I identified girls who held leadership positions in Jewish and non-Jewish youth organizations, girls who were involved in social justice programs, and girls who wrote about their involvement with social justice initiatives. After I received approval from Lesley University's IRB, I reached out to these girls directly, through contacts who knew them, or through the organization they were affiliated with. Some of them agreed to participate.

Non-affiliated Girls. I recruited girls who were not affiliated with Jewish organizations in a few different ways. In one case, a girl's mother heard about the study through a Facebook post, and the girl contacted me directly. I found a few other girls through Instagram. I noticed that they had Jewish symbols up on their bios or that they had an occasional post about Antisemitism. Other than these posts, they were not involved in other Jewish activities.

Overall, recruitment took three months, and I enrolled participants through an ongoing process.

Phase II: Screening

After the girls expressed initial interest in the study, I conducted a screening process to explain the research process and ensure that they met the eligibility criteria (female-identifying, Jewish-identifying, high school age, and living in the United States). In cases where potential participants and I communicated over platforms other than email (text or private messaging such as Facebook or Instagram), I asked for their email addresses so I could send them the assent/consent forms, interview questions, study flyer, and a copy of the interview questions from my Lesley email account.

After participants confirmed their interest in the study and returned their consent/assent forms with parent/guardian signatures (Appendix B, C, and D), we confirmed a time for the interview. At the beginning of the data collection process, I hosted a preliminary Zoom session with each participant. The goal of these sessions was to explain the study process and build rapport since I was concerned that the interview process could be overwhelming or uncomfortable given the participants' age and the power I held over them. However, I stopped conducting these sessions after the fifth one. I found that girls were less inhibited than I anticipated, and they shared a lot about themselves during the sessions. While this was an assumption, I observed that the girls shared openly about their lives and did not appear to be nervous when they spoke to me. I attributed this to the pandemic, which made it common practice for people to communicate with one another over social media, and the girls' age, since the majority of their communications took place over social media. I did not have their consent/assent at this point, so I was unable to record any of the data. I was also concerned that the sharing that occurred could negatively impact the data collection process since some of the questions would not seem fresh or new when I asked them during the interviews. These sessions were also time-consuming, and they impacted my ability to meet with other girls.

From that point forward, I conducted all the screening by chatting with girls through instant messaging and/or email. If participants expressed interest in participating in the study, I sent them consent/assent forms, and we confirmed a time for the interview.

Consent. Participants and/or their parents returned their signed consent/assent forms to me (see Appendix C and D) before the interviews. I began each interview by reviewing the goals of the study. I asked for participants' permission to record the interviews and explained that I would use the recordings for research purposes only. I encouraged participants to ask questions during the interviews and emphasized the open-ended structure of the interview format. I told them that they could say anything they felt would be relevant to the conversation; they could choose to end the conversation at any time and refuse to answer questions without penalty.

Phase III: Interviews

I used semi-structured interviewing as the primary method for data collection. Galetta (2013) describes the semi-structured interview as an important vehicle for "bringing to the surface the multidimensional nature of lived experience. It responds to an imperative for fine-grained analyses in order to open up new possibilities in understanding complicated phenomena often accepted as unproblematic" (p. 2). This method allows for the discovery of new and unanticipated information by creating space for an open and unstructured conversation between the researcher and participant (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). This made sense given the nature of my inquiry, as I hoped to discover knowledge that was unknown to me from the girls. I adopted a feminist, power-sharing approach (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007; Reinharz & Davidman, 1992) and took great measures to reduce power between myself and the girls by encouraging them to insert their own thoughts and ideas. In this way, the participants could see me as a person, as well as an interviewer.

Charmaz (2006) states that "interviews occur under specific research conditions and interactional situations within larger social, cultural, and historical contexts" (p. 79). At the same time, she is careful to note that this method has been criticized for decentralizing power from the individual and for misrepresenting the totality of their experience since it focuses on one specific moment in time (see Briggs, 2001, 2007; Oakley, 1981). She acknowledges these criticisms and claims that they can be remedied if the researcher is able to acknowledge how their power and subjectivity inform their interpretation of the data. Josselson (2013) attends to this with her concept of *reflexivity*, which requires the researcher to “recognize [their] own assumptions or preconceptions about the person or narratives that [they] are about to encounter” (p. 27). I engaged in reflexivity by reflecting on how my thoughts and experiences shaped my beliefs and by reflecting on where I stood in relation to the participants.

I conducted 32 interviews. Each interview lasted between 90 minutes and three hours, with the average interview lasting approximately two hours. All interviews were conducted over Zoom. They were all recorded with participants’ permission. They were either transcribed with Zoom software or by me, and I checked them all for accuracy.

Interview Guide. According to Glesne (2011), the goal of the interview is to “get words to fly” (p. 102). I needed to create an environment where participants felt encouraged to speak comfortably about their experiences, which I did by sharing aspects of myself with the girls, encouraging them to share aspects of themselves with me, and showing a vested interest in their lives. Glesne advises that the questions should reflect the social and cultural contexts of participants’ lives and an awareness of the context of the researcher’s life.

I prepared a 22-question open-ended interview guide (see Appendix E) that addressed different aspects of participants’ identity-making experiences. I sent it to participants when they first expressed interest in the study (and before they consented to participate). The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section focused on participants’ backgrounds, where they lived, their perceptions of their schools, their hobbies, and their families. The second section focused on identity. I asked girls about their Jewish upbringing, their racial and ethnic identity, their socioeconomic background, their sexual identity, and how they experienced the intersection between their identities. In the final section, I asked girls about their activism— the issues they cared about, how they came to care about them, and how their identities intersected with their activism. In most interviews, I was able to ask all of the questions, though not necessarily in the order in which they were listed.

Phase IV: Survey

To ensure that I accurately represented participants' identities and experiences, and assist with scheduling focus groups, I asked the girls to complete a Google survey after they completed the interview portion of the study (see Appendix F). I sent the survey to each girl individually. I told the participants that their participation in the focus groups was optional, and they were under no obligation to attend. I provided potential meeting times for focus groups so I could get a sense of the girls' availability. Thirty out of 32 girls completed the survey.

The survey included open-ended questions about race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual identity, and religious identity. For example, "Please describe your gender. How do you relate to your gender identity?" While I asked the girls about their racial, ethnic, and class identities during the interviews, I felt that it was important to provide them with an additional opportunity to share aspects of themselves that they might not have felt comfortable sharing during the interviews. I also asked them to define their Jewish identities and describe the Jewish activities they were involved with. Given that this was a study about girlhood and agency, I asked participants whether they identified as feminists and who they admired. I was also curious to know how they understood themselves in relation to the world, so I asked them to describe themselves in five words. I also asked if they would like to participate in a particular affinity group. Finally, I asked what, if anything, came up for participants during the interviews.

Phase V: Focus Group

I conducted focus groups to bring participants together around their shared identities and experiences. Patton (2015) describes focus groups as a useful way to gather information since "people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others" (p. 475). Focus groups are a common research practice when working with members of vulnerable and/or marginalized populations or when little is known about a topic. In the case of Jewish activist girls, particularly those who held marginalized and/or unseen identities due to race, class, ethnic, and/or gender differences, the focus groups provided an important way to enhance the findings from the interviews. However, the data derived from these sessions must be interpreted with caution, since participants may feel the need to "perform" rather than reveal their true selves. Group dynamics can also be tricky since participants can dominate the conversation, alienate others, or engage in "groupthink" behaviors where they feel as though they need to model what others say (Smithson, 2000).

I felt that it was important to provide all participants with a space where they could engage in open and authentic conversations about race since it emerged as an important topic during the interviews. I was curious to understand how girls who were White navigated their relationship to Whiteness and whether Jewish girls of Color felt visible as Jews, and how this showed up in their activism. It was apparent that girls of all races were navigating incredibly complex identities and that race played a salient factor in their definition of self. They all expressed the desire to speak with girls with whom they shared similar racial identities since they had limited opportunities to do so, and theirs were challenging identities to navigate. I held a focus group specifically for three biracial girls, although they also participated in a larger affinity group for Jews of Color. The focus groups provided girls with a unique opportunity to feel recognized and heard by their peers. The girls enthusiastically supported one another as they listened to each other's struggles and accomplishments.

The following is a text chat from one of the White girls' focus groups: "OMG! I started a jsu at my school too for the same reasons!! (Antisemitism) and we're on separate sides of the country! That is so cool!!"

I developed two different focus group protocols: one for girls who identified as White, and one for girls who identified as girls of color (see Appendixes G and H). While they were fairly similar, they differed on questions around racial identity. I asked girls who were White about their relationship to Whiteness, and I asked girls of color about their experiences as Jews of Color.

I held four focus groups: two groups for girls who identified as White; both groups were attended by six girls and lasted for two hours. I ran another focus group for three girls who identified as biracial; this group lasted for two hours. I ran another focus group for Jewish girls of color that was attended by seven girls and lasted two hours.[88] While other girls expressed interest in participating in the focus groups, their schedules precluded them from participating. At the end of the focus groups, the girls traded email addresses and Instagram profiles.

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[88] There was overlap between the Jewish girls of color and the biracial group. One girl who was in the White group also participated in the Jewish girl of color group. This speaks to the complexity and importance of identity work.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

I used transcription software provided by Zoom to transcribe the majority of interviews and focus groups. I forgot to select this option with a few of the interviews, so I transcribed these on my own. I went through each interview and focus group line-by-line. I listened to them against the recorded versions to make sure all the transcriptions were accurate. During each listening, I took notes and expanded on themes when it felt necessary. I paid close attention to the inflections in the participants' voices and made note of their pauses and hesitations, drawing from Brown and Gilligan's (1992) voice centered method.

I assigned each participant a pseudonym to protect her/their identity. Participants are referred to by these names in all study documents. Before participating in focus groups, I made participants aware that other participants would have access to their identifying information, which would compromise their anonymity. The data for the study were coded in three phases. I developed core categories, axial codes, and selective codes, all of which contributed toward the development of theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994).

With grounded theory, data analysis is an ongoing process that occurs in tandem with data collection (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As I made my way through the data, I determined which were meaningful and assigned preliminary codes to them. I began to build preliminary concepts, or "core explanatory categories," to account for themes that resonated with my research question (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 45). Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommend collecting data with a *theoretical purpose and relevance* (p. 48) to the research inquiry. In many cases, I highlighted "chunks" of data and lifted codes *in vivo* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) from the text itself to capture girls' authentic words and statements. For example, as one of the girls described her challenging relationship with God, she posed the question, "Why is God not a nice person?" I thought that this could be significant to her— and potentially other girls'— descriptions of how they were navigating religious identity. Several other girls also talked about God, and eventually, I combined her code into a larger code, called "Questioning God." I was constantly adding codes and collapsing and merging others to account for variations in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Data from all interviews and focus groups were entered into NVIVO and coded this way.

Vollstedt and Rezat (2019) note that "one characteristic of grounded theory is that data collection, data analysis, and theory development are not successive steps in the research procedure but are intertwined and interdependent" (p. 85), which helps to ensure greater precision with theory development (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). After the initial codes and subcodes had been established, I had more than 70 codes. I went through a painstaking process of "cleaning" the data, where I opened every node and checked every "chunk" of data to make sure that it was accurately coded and that it would assist with theory development. I realized that some data had been coded multiple times or were out of place. After the data was in order, I developed axial codes to explain the relationships between the different categories (Strauss & Glaser, 1967). I developed a code book (Appendix I), where I explained the relationships between the codes and subcodes. In the third round of coding, selective coding, I identified six primary topics (i.e., Activist Identity; Being Jewish; Figuring Out What It's Like to be a Young Jewish Adult; Antisemitism and Israel; Revealing/Concealing Jewishness/Editing Part of Oneself; and Social-Emotional Health and Well-being) and several subtopics.

With qualitative research, every observation, randomly jotted note, and piece of text becomes an important part of the analysis (Maxwell, 2013). I referred to the memos that I wrote throughout data collection as an "interactive space for exploration and discovery" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 170). It was important to bracket my thoughts and impressions, given how “situated” I was in the data (Clarke, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I raised issues that stood out to me, posed questions, and identified potential linkages or patterns that I identified with the data. Strauss and Corbin (1990) note that “memos are not simply about ‘ideas,’ they are involved in the formulation and revision of theory during the research process” (p. 10). I also explored the many thoughts, ideas, and concerns I had with my dissertation advisor. These were later incorporated into the analysis. I also examined potential relationships between concepts by running cross-tabulations (race and experience in Jewish spaces, geographic location, and access to the Jewish community) within the data.

Working with both NVIVO and a Google document, I analyzed the data from the surveys separately and included them in the general analysis. While some of the data was qualitative, such as how girls affiliated religiously, other data was quantitative, such as how girls described their sexual identity. These findings helped to support the data from the interviews and focus groups and also to point out the contradictions and messiness in the girls’ identity-making processes.

Grounded theory is an iterative process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), where the theory emerges from the data. In the case of my research, my question changed after I came to know the data. I initially began with the question, “How do Jewish activist girls navigate their intersectional identities?” I assumed that the girls with whom I would be working would identify as activists and that intersectionality— that is, how they were contending with different interlocking aspects of their identities— would manifest as the most important issues. However, as I spoke with girls and learned more about them, I learned two things: not all girls identified as “activists,” which was developmentally appropriate and resonates with Taft’s (2011) findings;

and also, identity, rather than intersectionality, appeared to be the utmost issue on their minds. With this in mind, it felt both appropriate and necessary to change the research questions.

Following Maxwell's (2013) advice, I also examined potential relationships through a conceptual framework. A conceptual framework provides an alternative way of looking at themes, concepts, and variables and studying the relationships between them (Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2013). It can take the form of a visual or written document. I created several different versions to assist with theory development.

Ethical Considerations

There were several ethical considerations involved with this study. Youth of all ages are considered a vulnerable population that requires special protection since they do not possess the full capacity to make informed decisions for themselves. I had to consider the risks and discomforts that the study could bring up for girls. I was asking them about their experiences with sensitive topics, such as mental health, sexual assault, race, Antisemitism, Israel, and sexual identity, during a vulnerable time in their lives. I did not have answers for them or ways to improve their situation. I also realized that I could have been the first person that they disclosed confidential information to. I hoped that by giving them a space to feel heard, I could help in some way.

Some girls had a lot to say about their experiences with race, sexism, and feeling unheard. One girl spoke about a traumatic experience she had when her friends told her that she was not an Ashkenazi Jew, although she believed she was. I listened and suggested ways that she could better explain her position to her friends. I did not feel that it was my "job" to offer advice to the girls, but given the relational nature of the work, I wanted to provide support if they asked for it. The art of interviewing is personal, and when girls shared aspects of their lives that were difficult or challenging, I made sure to listen since some girls just wanted to feel validated and heard. They were sharing topics that they did not feel that they had permission to share in other spaces. I felt that it was both a privilege and a responsibility to listen. Another girl spoke about the challenges she faced as a Jew of Color. She was not able to participate in a focus group due to mental health issues. While I assume that factors outside of the study contributed to her condition, I felt a deep sense of care and compassion for her and wished that I could have done more for her. It is also important to acknowledge that I had little, if any, research on which to ground my study. I did not know what it would be like to engage in online conversations with Jewish girl activists about their identities and what this would bring up for them. This was unknown territory for me and the girls, and we had to figure it out together. I wrote memos about these experiences, as I was concerned that they would affect my interpretation of the data.

After participants expressed interest in the study, they received a copy of the Lesley University IRB-approved consent form. They were required to sign in order to participate in the study. If they were under the age of 18, they received a copy of the Lesley University-approved consent form, which a parent or guardian had to sign. They also received a copy of the Lesley University-approved assent form, which they had to sign in order to participate in the study. I also explained the goals of the study to participants before the interviews began, and I asked for their permission to record the interviews. I reminded them of their right to stop the interviews at any point, to refuse to answer questions, and to ask questions of their own.

I let participants know that their answers were confidential, unless they said something that raised concern about their safety or anyone else's. I made participants aware that they would be assigned a pseudonym and that other identifying details, such as where they lived and the schools they attended, would not be used in the study's findings. I told them that I would store all data in a password-protected file on my computer and that I would destroy all study files after seven years. I assured them that I would be the only person who would have access to their information. All Zoom sessions for interviews and focus groups were private and password protected. I monitored the waiting rooms to ensure that only people who were invited were in attendance.

I emailed each participant a separate link to the Google survey. I made them aware that if they chose to participate in a focus group, they would lose their anonymity since other participants would see their faces and learn their names. This could have serious consequences for participants since other people would know who they were and what they said. Until the actual focus group, I communicated with each participant privately, so as to ensure her/their privacy and confidentiality. Before each focus group, I reminded participants of the need for confidentiality during the session.

Researcher's Positionality

My positionality can impact the way that I respond to the data because I have a specific way of viewing Jewish girlhood, Jewish identity, Antisemitism, Israel, and Jewish activism. My interest in working with Jewish teenage girls is personal. I consider my own experience as a Jewish girl and my journey through Jewish girlhood to have been particularly formative. While that time in my life and the events that accompanied it happened a long time ago, I continue to reflect on it through different lenses as I grow older and my development continues, particularly now that I am the mother of a Jewish girl. As I write this dissertation and reflect on my research question, I am compelled to ask, "Why am I so interested in understanding the developmental experiences of Jewish activist girls?" Throughout my years at Lesley, I have learned that reflexivity, or the ability to pose questions back onto myself, is important. I try to model that for the students I work with and for my own children, yet I always put my guard up when others are so beautifully able to model that for me. The ability to time travel— to really go back into my own adolescence and allow myself to go back into that vulnerable place— remains challenging in so many ways. It also gave me insight into the participants' experiences.

The truth is that I heavily critiqued the girl I was, who felt unseen and unheard, who had a lot to say but couldn't say it because the space did not exist for a girl like me and, to an extent, still doesn't. I judged her harshly for being angry and emotional, untethered, and confused. Looking back at the literature and the gaps within it, I see that the generational trauma is real— Jewish girls are still invisible in so many ways. We are everywhere and nowhere. By that, I mean that Jewish people as a whole are both strong and vulnerable. We are here, we are alive, yet the hatred against us is real, and there are few spaces for us to have these concerns validated. We are blamed for being caught in a "narrow space" when we are barely given space of our own to exist and speak our truths. Who are we? How can we define ourselves and enter into conversations?

I was raised in a middle-class suburb outside of Boston that was dominated by an angry, confused, and controlling man. I am the second of three girls. Though there were few Jews in our community, religion was an important part of my identity, cemented by my mother's family and a tight peer group formed by our local synagogue. These warm and fuzzy experiences also created a wedge in my identity, and I grew up juxtaposed between two very different worlds. I leaned heavily into my Jewish identity and the communities I established through my youth group and camp, which anchored me during my parents' turbulent separation and divorce, which occurred during my freshman year of high school, and whose aftermath followed me into college and adulthood. Activism, feminism, Women's Studies, Jewish community, friends, and family helped me understand how to question, revisit history, connect it to larger systemic and cultural patterns, look critically into my own communities with love and compassion, and resist disempowering beliefs I held to be true. It is for these reasons that I am particularly interested in learning about Jewish adolescent girls and the multiplicities of their identities.

It was important to reflect on these identities as I engaged in this important and greatly needed work with Jewish adolescent girls. I had to remain cognizant of the power I held over them as an older, White, cis-gender, middle-class, heterosexual, partnered, Reform woman and mother who had more life experience than they did. I also needed to let go of my own pain, baggage, and experience, or at least put it to the side, so I could hear their stories clearly. I had to remember my strength and fortitude and find theirs. In some cases, I held racial and/or socioeconomic privilege over them, and in others, our religious and/or life experiences differed significantly. I had to bear in mind that our opinions could be worlds apart when it came to thorny topics such as Israel-Palestine, feminism, and race, all of which I addressed in the interview questions. I needed to remember that, while I was emotionally invested in this work, their lives were not mine, and mine were not theirs.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria for trustworthiness are the most widely used among qualitative researchers (Elo et al., 2014). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness indicates that “the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to” (p. 290). It refers to the researcher’s confidence in the data and methods they use to guide their inquiry. While trustworthiness is generally agreed upon as an important standard through which to guide research, experts use a variety of approaches and measures to identify it (Leung, 2015). Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that trustworthiness consists of the following criteria: credibility, dependability, transferability, confirmability, and authenticity, all of which are described in further detail below.

Credibility

Credibility serves as a corollary to internal validity. It means that the data adequately represents participants and their experiences. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose three criteria for ensuring the credibility of a study. These include prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation. I ensured the credibility of the study by listening to the data from the recorded interviews and focus groups several times over and analyzing the survey documents closely before engaging in the analysis. I spent a significant amount of time with the data before I began the analysis process, and I went back to it frequently during the analysis process. I wrote several memos during this time. These helped with the analysis since I could bracket my feelings and observations. I ensured triangulation by using three different methods of data collection: interviews, focus groups, and surveys. I did not ignore the potential for bias, but rather noted it and acknowledged how it impacted my positionality and my use of self as an interpreter.

Dependability

Dependability speaks to the extent to which the findings would be consistent if they were repeated with another sample. Elo et al. (2014) note, “The dependability of a study is high if another researcher can readily follow the decision trail used by the initial researcher” (p. 7). To this end, I created an audit trail that included aspects of the entire study, including data collection instruments, a data set, consent forms, and my observations from the data collection process. The data collection instruments included the interview protocol, the focus group protocols, and the survey. The data included the recorded interviews and focus group sessions, the transcribed interviews and responses to the focus groups, participants' responses to the surveys, and field notes and memos that I took during the data collection process. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym. I kept all the data in a password-protected document. I kept one copy on my computer, and I stored the other copy in a binder that I secured in a locked filing cabinet. This enabled me to refer back to the decisions that I made and how I made them.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the final condition of trustworthiness. This ensures that the findings are corroborated by participants rather than the researcher's own thoughts and biases. The researcher can use a number of strategies to ensure confirmability. I developed a coding manual to explain why I named the codes as I did and describe my process for merging the codes together. I also created a journal to explain how I interpreted the data. This encouraged reflexivity and ensured my ability to examine relationships with participants. It also served as a reflection of my positionality and my attention to the criteria established in the analysis.

Transferability

Transferability, or external validity, speaks to the generalizability of the methodology and its findings (Patton, 2015). The study focused on how 32 Jewish activist girls navigated their relationship to voice, visibility, and representation with regard to issues around race, Antisemitism, religious identity, Israel, sexual identity, gender identity, class, and more. By providing a thick description of the social context in which participants' lives were situated, I provided a detailed overview of their experiences. The use of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and surveys provided ample opportunities to center participants' voices and create opportunities for open, unstructured dialogue. Findings from this study should be regarded as a starting point for future inquiry about Jewish girls' experiences rather than an end point for making conclusions about them.

Limitations

This study involved asking a racially, ethnically, socioeconomically, geographically, and religiously diverse sample of 32 Jewish activist girls how they navigated issues regarding voice, visibility, and representation. There were several limitations to the study. While the population was meant to represent a diverse population of Jewish adolescent girls, it was not a truly representative sample. Jewish girls represent many different identities, and it was not possible to capture them all. For example, I was unable to recruit girls who identified as *Mizrahi*, working-class, secular and/or cultural Jews, ultra-Orthodox, transgender, or girls who fell into other marginalized identity groups. I believe that a large part had to do with the social networks that I am a part of, which resulted in this purposive sample. For example, if I were ultra-Orthodox, I imagine that it would have been easier to reach girls from these communities. This also had to do with the ways that I was connecting with girls. Since I was largely connecting with them through social media, they had to have access to these platforms and/or someone else to pique their interest in the study. It is also important to note that there were also inconsistencies with how they reported their religious identities in the demographic survey and in the interview, which made it difficult to truly know how they identified religiously. Some girls checked off several categories for their religious identities in the survey, such as "Conservative," "Just Jewish," and "Figuring it Out," which I took as a sign that they were actively exploring their religious identities. I tried to reach out to secular organizations to recruit Jewish girls who were secular and/or unaffiliated, but I did not have any success this way. It was also difficult to reach girls who identified as working-class and/or poor. This likely had to do with the fact that girls who engage in Jewish social networks are likely to be middle- and/or upper-class. I also attribute this function to my own social networks.

COVID-19

Finally, the impact of COVID-19 cannot be ignored. Data collection took place from early March 2021 to late May 2021. This was an unprecedented time, during which many participants were forced to attend school online (depending on the guidelines in their state), while those in private schools, or in states with lower incidence rates were able to attend school in person or in a hybrid format. Toward the end of the data phase, vaccines started to become available to adolescents ages 16 years of age and older. While I cannot ascertain the impact of COVID-19 on participants' lives, it likely impacted their social and emotional wellbeing, identity development, and participation in activism in unanticipated ways. For example, incidents of anxiety and depression among children and teens reached unprecedented rates (see Racine et al., 2021), which could have impacted girls' willingness and/or ability to participate in the study or how they presented themselves. Many teens and children suffered from "Zoom fatigue" after spending endless hours of the day in online school (Mcnamara, 2020). Conversely, girls might have also benefited from having access to the study since it afforded them an opportunity to speak about their lives with a caring and patient person who listened attentively. Moreover, those who participated in the focus groups also had an opportunity to feel seen and heard by other peers with whom they shared similar experiences. Many girls shared that they were grateful to have participated in the study and that they were eager to read the findings.

Delimitations

Delimitations or boundaries for the study included that participants identify as Jewish and female, that they were in high school or rising high schoolers, and that they currently resided in the United States. All participants in the study met these criteria.

Summary

In this chapter, I describe how I used a grounded theory approach to examine how 32 Jewish activist girls navigated their relationship to voice, visibility, and representation. I shared the questions that I used to guide my inquiry and explained why it made sense to use a qualitative approach for the study. I described my extensive recruitment process, which consisted of purposeful and snowball sampling. I explained the rigorous research design, which consisted of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and a survey. The use of these methods allowed for rich and complex data to emerge. I explained some of the strengths and challenges that arose from working with the abundance of data that emerged from the study. I described the measures I used, such as journaling, bracketing my assumptions, conceptual mapping, and rigorous analysis, to ensure that the data was properly coded and analyzed. I also explored my positionality as a researcher and the limitations and delimitations of the study.

In Chapter Four, I introduce the research participants to the reader as a way to understand the richness of the study sample.

Chapter 4: Research Participants

In this chapter, I introduce the Jewish activist girls/individuals who participated in the study. The descriptions come from the girls' words and the ways that they described themselves. The goal of this section is to use the girls' words to provide the reader with a sense of who they are. The 32 vignettes illustrate each girl's unique story and the intricacies of her lived experience. Understanding who the girls are is essential for grounding the relational aspect of the study. This sample of Jewish girls is distinctive in a few particular ways. The majority are affiliated or identified Jews, meaning that they have Jewish friends, they celebrate Jewish holidays, and they affiliate with synagogues, Jewish day schools, and camps (Aronson et al., 2019; Hartman & Sheskin, 2011). This is not an experience that is shared among all Jewish girls in America. All of the girls are also activists. They have made it their mission to respond to injustices in their communities and beyond. Each girl has her own unique story that is influenced by multiple factors, including where she lives, her friend group, her religious upbringing, her family dynamic, her hobbies, her physical and mental health, and her family history.

The girls shared a great deal about themselves, and I had to decide which information was most relevant to the research questions. I emphasized where the girls spoke about their family histories and their religious upbringing since this provided a rich context for understanding the different social contexts in which the girls were acculturated and how this influenced their ways of seeing and being in the world and relating to it. I also highlighted areas when they spoke about injustices they experienced and how they responded to them, since this allowed me to understand how they positioned themselves as activists. Finally, I felt that it was important to highlight their interactions with the social constructs and institutions in which they live, such as family, race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual identity, school, friendship networks, and social class.

These factors all impacted how girls felt about their experiences as Jews, regarding when, where, and how they felt seen and unseen, and where they felt they could be in community with others. Some of the areas I chose to leave out were the girls' detailed descriptions of their schools and their non-activist hobbies and interests since those areas were not relevant to the study. I present the vignettes based on some of the most emergent themes from the girls' narratives, as they provide an important context for understanding the girls and set the stage for the findings presented in Chapter 5. The girls met many different categories. They are organized by how the girls spoke about their lived experiences and narrated their lives. I developed themes for the categories based on the ways that the girls spoke about their activism and their "becoming activists" (Taft, 2011). Some of the girls' narratives emphasized their willingness to speak up against Antisemitism and on behalf of racial equality, whereas other girls were hesitant to show aspects of themselves in certain spaces. Some girls indicated that they felt particularly supported by their Jewish communities, while others were trying to find their place within them. The categories reflect the different ways girls described their experiences advocating for themselves and their beliefs. The vignettes play an essential role in helping to answer the research questions:

> RQ1: How do Jewish activist girls navigate their relationship to voice, visibility, and representation?
>
> RQ2: What are the unique challenges experienced by Jewish girl activists?
>
> RQ3: How do Jewish girl activists exercise resistance against the challenges they experience?

The Participants

Searching for Religious Identity

Chloe is a 17-year-old high school senior. She lives on the West Coast with her parents and two younger siblings. She identifies as a White, cisgender, straight, upper middle-class, Reform Jew. Her ancestors come from Poland, France, and Ireland. Chloe attends a small Catholic high school where she is the only Jewish student. She transferred from a large public school after her freshman year. Chloe found the school on her own, and she likes it for its small size. Chloe describes the area where she lives as predominantly White and “hippie dippie.”

Judaism did not play a formative role in Chloe’s upbringing. She celebrated some of the holidays with her family. Chloe’s mother grew up in a modern Orthodox household, but she rejected many of the traditions when she became an adult. Her father was raised as a secular Jew. Chloe’s maternal grandparents and her cousins practice modern Orthodoxy. However, their way of practicing Judaism feels unfamiliar to her.

Chloe’s first exposure to Judaism was in middle school. She befriended a group of Jewish peers, some of whom were Israeli. After attending their b’nai mitzvot, she was instantly hooked. She had no idea that there were so many Jewish families in her community. Chloe began thinking about her own Jewish identity and decided that she wanted to pursue her Jewish education. Her parents supported her decision. She began to study with a tutor, and she is now preparing for her bat mitzvah. Her family also joined a Reform synagogue at her insistence.

Chloe “trie[s] to do as much like Jewish-related stuff as possible.” She is involved in a Jewish youth group, and she runs an Israel club at her school. She feels that “Israel is intellectual, and that was like part of why I like, just gravitated towards that.” Chloe is committed to speaking up against Antisemitism and educating people about Israel. She cares about other civic issues, such as racism, climate change, and voting rights. She recently organized a voter registration drive at her school. She and her friends also created an app for teens to anonymously report their experiences with Antisemitism. Chloe plans to attend college next year.

Phoebe is an 18-year-old senior at a public high school. Phoebe identifies as White, Jewish, and upper middle-class. The majority of students in Phoebe's school are South Asian or East Asian. Phoebe lives with their parents and two younger siblings in an affluent suburb in the Northeast. They are the third child in their family. Phoebe is gender queer and uses they/them pronouns.

Phoebe's mother was born into a large, poor evangelical Christian family in the South. Phoebe's father was born into a middle-class Jewish family in the Northeast. His family celebrated Jewish holidays, and he had a bar mitzvah. Phoebe, their mother, and their siblings went through a formal conversion when they were three years old to appease their paternal grandmother, who wanted Jewish grandchildren. However, "it [Judaism] didn't really feel very prevalent." Phoebe never went to religious school, and their family did not belong to a synagogue. Phoebe's peers told them that they were not Jewish because they did not have a b'mitzvah, which bothered them.

Last year, Phoebe's sibling told them about a Jewish fellowship program where they could meet other teens and study Jewish texts. The program opened Phoebe's eyes to different ways of being Jewish, and they have developed an interest in learning more about their Jewish identity. Phoebe feels most comfortable in queer-friendly, modern Orthodox Jewish spaces. They now prepare for Shabbat at home each Friday. They also wear a *yarmulke* (a Jewish skullcap that is traditionally worn by men as a sign of reverence to God).

Phoebe is passionate about writing, feminism, racial equity, LGBTQ+ rights, and comprehensive sex education. Phoebe is unsure of their plans for next year. They are college-bound, but they may want to take a gap year to learn more about themselves and experience the world.

Yael is 18 years old. She is a senior at a charter school in the Southwest. She lives in a suburb with her parents and her younger sibling. Yael identifies as a Latinx, cisgender, heterosexual, lower middle-class, Reform Jew. The community where she lives is predominantly White and Christian, though her neighborhood is largely populated by low-income Hispanic families. Yael has experienced Antisemitism at her school and racism in Jewish spaces. She feels as though she has to present herself based on different people's expectations.

Yael's mother is a White, Ashkenazi Jew who was raised in a Conservative household in the South. Her maternal grandparents immigrated to the United States from Eastern Europe in the early 1900s. Her great-grandfather was a religiously pious man who would repeat the entire seder twice each night during both nights of the Passover seder. Her maternal grandmother cares about the "heavy cultural imbuing of religious Judaism into her everyday life." Yael's father is a Jew by choice. He was raised in poverty in a small, Catholic village in Mexico. His brothers moved to the United States, and he eventually followed them. Yael's father became a citizen of the United States and converted to Judaism shortly before she was born.

The Jewish community where Yael lives is small; there are only three other Jewish students at her school. She recalls that "every year [I would] bring in this, like, chocolate in December, and like, that was kind of it." Yael's family belongs to a small Reform congregation in a nearby town. Yael is involved in the youth group, but they do not have many events. She also teaches in the synagogue's religious school. Yael is interested in learning more about her

Jewish identity. During COVID-19, she attended a few online youth group events where she was able to connect with Jewish peers from all over the world. She also began cooking foods for Jewish holidays and reading sacred Jewish texts. Last summer, she participated in a university-based learning program with Jewish peers. Yael is passionate about immigration reform, fighting Antisemitism, Israel, education, racial equity, and feminism. She is planning to attend college next year.

Amira is 17 years old. She is a senior at a selective admissions magnet school. She lives in an affluent community in the Southeast with her parents and three siblings. The area where she lives has a large Jewish population, though there are not many Jewish students in her grade. Amira identifies as a cisgender, heterosexual, upper middle-class, Conservative Jew who is exploring her religious identity.

Amira identifies as Israeli. Her father was born in Israel, and he lived there until he was 18. He is of Iraqi origin, but his family had to leave because of Antisemitism. Amira’s paternal grandfather and several of her father’s siblings also live in America. Amira’s mother is Ashkenazi, and she was raised in an Orthodox home in the Northeast. Amira’s family belongs to an Orthodox synagogue, but they identify as Conservative. They attend synagogue frequently and maintain a kosher home. Amira’s family blends Ashkenazi and Sephardi traditions in their home.

Amira is grappling with questions about her religious and spiritual identity. She refers to this as her “Jewish identity crisis.” She recently went on a religious teen tour program to Israel. When she came home, she felt inspired to deepen her religious practice by keeping Shabbat and praying regularly. She also began to participate in a religious youth group. Amira’s parents tried to discourage her from moving in this direction. She explains that “I was trying to find myself… I was confused as to who I was.”

Amira is involved in the Jewish Student Union and the Holocaust education program at her school. She also volunteers with a teen philanthropy program, an Israeli advocacy program, and a teen learning program at her synagogue. Amira plans to attend college next year. She hopes to expand her religious exploration.

Liana is 14 years old. They identify as a White, bisexual, middle-class, Jewish human who is questioning her/their belief in religion, particularly around God. She/They do not like the concept of pronouns, so they will answer to her or them. They claim, “I am female, but I'm also a human, and I like to think that there is no gender. So, I'm going to just be like, human.” Liana’s parents are unaware of her/their sexuality.

Liana lives near a major city on the West Coast with her/their parents and her/their younger sibling. Their neighborhood is close to several synagogues and kosher restaurants. They were raised in a modern Orthodox household. Liana is struggling to reconcile her/their religious beliefs with her/their family’s. She/They claim, “Even though I'm feeling like, atheistic I still have to do the things because I'm still a child living in my family's house.” Liana participates in an independent online school program. They used to attend a Jewish day school, but they left due to incessant bullying from their peers.

There is a wide range of religious diversity in Liana’s extended family. Liana’s father attended Yeshiva schools but turned to modern Orthodoxy as an adult. Liana’s mother’s family became modern Orthodox during her childhood. Some of her siblings are modern Orthodox, and others are less religious. When Liana is with her/their extended family, she/they have to play along with traditional gender roles. Her/Their cousins sometimes make sexist remarks that really bother them.

Liana struggles with anxiety and depression. She/They think that it is important to create a culture of openness about these issues. Liana is passionate about feminism, mental health advocacy, BLM, and LGBTQ+ advocacy. Liana wants to be an actress when she/they grow up.

Concealment of Self

Jordana is 17 years old and a senior at a charter school on the West Coast. She identifies as an upper middle-class, Persian, cisgender, heterosexual, Conservative Jew. Jordana is a first-generation American. She lives with her parents and two younger siblings in an affluent suburb that is largely populated by other Persian Jews. Jordana's parents immigrated to the United States when they were younger. Jordana describes her family as "forward-thinking, feminists, and, like, progressive." She attributes this to the fact that her mother was raised in a community that was predominantly White and Christian. She had to learn how to assimilate.

Jordana's family belongs to a Conservative synagogue, and they keep kosher at home. They do not eat shellfish or pork or mix milk with meat. She ends up feeling a bit of "culture shock" when she hangs out with her Reform friends, who eat pepperoni pizza and *hametz* (leavened products) after seven days of Passover.[89] Jordana's school has a large Persian population, but she is not friends with them. "We all refer to them as the Persians because they're just kind of one group that, like, all mingle together but I've never really been a part of that." While Jordana is proud to be Persian, she feels that many Persian Americans are politically conservative and materialistic. "I'm not like traditional Persian. Like, my family isn't decked out in Gucci. We don't have a room full of untouchables, or we don't, like, speak exclusively in Farsi."

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[89] Conservative and Traditional Jews observe for eight days.

Jordana is passionate about Israel, feminism, immigration reform, reproductive rights, gender equality, and speaking out against Antisemitism. She feels that her opinions are too progressive for the Persian community, but that she will also be rejected by activists on the far-left because she supports Israel. Jordana started her own non-profit to provide menstrual products to girls and women in developing countries. Her organization grew from her own experience with early menstruation, which she was ashamed of for several years. Jordana is also involved with several leadership activities at her school. She plans to attend college next year.

Alaina is 16 years old and a junior at a public high school in the Northeast. She describes herself as a "politically active poetic dreamer in a Russian Jewish conservative household." Alaina is White, cisgender, middle-class, and culturally Jewish. Alaina thinks she might be bisexual.

Alaina is a first-generation American who identifies as Uzbekistani, Belarusian, Ukrainian, and Israeli. Her parents immigrated when they were teenagers. She lives with her parents and two younger siblings in a largely White, middle-class community. They used to live in a neighborhood where they were surrounded by other Russian Jews. Alaina remembers, "There was a synagogue in the back of my old house, so we would do like, *matza* making, and we used to make donuts for Hanukkah, and we would have dancing and like, free food." She recalls, "I was, like, really proud of that too."

Alaina's grandparents tried to immigrate to America when her parents were younger. However, the government would not grant them permission to leave. Alaina's paternal grandparents escaped to Pakistan, and her father grew up there. Alaina's mother grew up in

Belarus. She and her family were discriminated against because they were Jewish. Their passports were marked “Jewish” to show their inferior status. Alaina’s parents immigrated to the United States as teenagers, where they experienced Antisemitism from their peers.

Alaina is concerned about a lot of issues, including Antisemitism, racism, Israel, LGBTQ+ rights, feminism, economics, and more. Her loyalty to these issues makes her feel as though she needs to watch what she says based on her audience. Alaina prefers to express herself through writing. She is involved with several writing groups and tutoring programs for underserved students. She feels that “no one really understands [her] perspective,” given all her different identities.

Emma is 17 years old. She is a senior at a small private school in the Northeast. She attended public school until partway through her freshman year. Emma lives in an affluent suburb with her parents and younger sibling. She identifies as a Hispanic, cisgender, upper middle-class, Reform Jew who is exploring her sexual identity. Emma’s parents are White. Her mother is Jewish, and her father is a non-practicing Catholic. She and her sibling were both adopted from Colombia. When she turns 18, she would like to find her birth mother. Several of Emma’s cousins are also adopted from South American countries.

Until recently, religion did not play a major role in Emma’s life. She attended religious school for a year at her family’s former synagogue. She left because the learning was boring. When Emma was 12 years old, she attended her cousin’s bat mitzvah. She enjoyed it so much that she wanted to have one of her own. Her parents hired a tutor to work with her, and she had hers “a year late,” when she was 14.

Emma became involved in a synagogue youth group and the high school program through one of her friends. “We had this, like, one activity and, like, I really liked the conversation we had. So, from there, I was like, ‘Oh yeah, I want to join.’” Her family now belongs to the synagogue, and they attend services on occasion.

Emma is passionate about immigration, feminism, human rights, racial justice, and team sports. Emma is part of an affinity group for Latinx/Hispanic students at her school. She is struggling to figure out how to meld her Hispanic and Jewish identities together. Emma wants to use her privilege to help people with less privilege. She plans to attend college next year.

Standing up for Jewish Identity

Ariella is 17 years old. She identifies as a White, upper middle-class, cisgender, queer, Reform Jew. Ariella is a junior at a Jewish high school in the Northeast. She has always attended Jewish day schools. She lives with her parents and two younger siblings in an affluent community. Judaism is important to Ariella’s family. Her family integrates Judaism into their lives through social action, attending synagogue, and celebrating holidays.

Ariella is a fourth-generation American. Her family immigrated from Russia in the early 1900s. Ariella’s father was raised in the Reform tradition by parents who identified as staunch Zionists. They were among the first people to purchase bonds from Israel. Her mother grew up in an assimilated household where she celebrated Christmas and Hanukkah. She became interested in Judaism as a young adult.

Social activism is important to Ariella. She serves on the leadership committee of her youth group. She also participates in a club at her school that aims to “lower the heat” on issues around mental health, diversity, and LGBTQ+ representation. Ariella describes her school as “very ‘White’ because they don't make an attempt to get basically any diversity.” She does most of her social justice work through her youth group. They work in coalitions with adults and communities of color around gun control, racial equality, LGBTQ+ equality, climate change, women’s rights, and more.

Ariella is open about her sexual identity with her youth group and her friends at camp. However, she does not feel that she can safely share this identity at school since “it's very hostile for members of the LGBTQ+ community. You don't come out of there because it's not healthy.” She wishes that things would change, but she doesn’t want it to be at her expense.

Simone is 17 years old and a junior at a public school in the Southeast. She identifies as a White, cisgender, lower middle-class, heterosexual, first-generation American Jew of Russian descent. She was raised in a household that was “more Russian than Jewish… when the Jewish holidays came around, you know, they [her family] really didn't know the background or like the story behind it.” Simone’s parents are divorced. She lives with her mother and her twin sibling. She lived apart from her father for several years, but he now lives nearby. Simone used to live in the Northeast, near other Russian Jews. She moved a few different times after her parents’ divorce. She experienced Antisemitism in some of these environments. Simone regrets that she did not defend herself in those situations, but she didn’t know what to do. She now lives in an area with a large Jewish population.

Simone’s parents immigrated to the United States from Russia when they were children. While she does not know much about her father’s family, she knows that her maternal grandmother did not have the opportunity to learn about Judaism. Simone’s maternal grandfather managed to study it in secret. Simone’s aunt and uncle sponsored her maternal grandparents’ visas to the United States. A few years ago, they paid for her to attend a Jewish overnight camp. She made wonderful friendships there. Since then, she has become more interested in learning about her Jewish identity. Simone now attends a local Chabad with her mother, and she helps out at the religious school. She claims, “I'm Jewish, you know, and I'm, like, 1,000% Jewish and proud. Like, I would wear it on my forehead if I could.”

Simone is interested in body positivity, advocating for Israel, speaking against Antisemitism, and protecting the rights of female prisoners. Simone used to struggle with her body image. She feels that some of her own issues are rooted in Russian culture, where thinness and beauty are emphasized in girls. Simone plans to attend college next year.

Samantha is 18 years old and a senior at a public high school in the Northeast. She lives in a predominantly White, affluent suburb with her parents and younger sibling. Samantha identifies as a White, cisgender, heterosexual, upper middle-class, Reform Jew. Samantha is one of few practicing Jews at her school. While there are other Jewish students, they “identify as Jewish but don't celebrate the holidays.” Samantha’s mother has always emphasized the importance of keeping Jewish tradition alive. Her family narrowly escaped Poland before the Holocaust. Several other family members were murdered by Nazis. She recalls hearing how two cousins went back to look for their family members, but they were never heard from again. Samantha is less familiar with her father’s family’s history, but she knows that they immigrated from Russia a long time ago.

Samantha has recently become interested in exploring her Jewish identity. Looking back on her years of religious school, she “absolutely despised it.” After her bat mitzvah, she vowed never to return to Jewish education. She changed her mind because she “just started… to, like, watch the news and, like, pay attention to some stuff and saw a lot of Antisemitic stuff happening.” She has since become involved in her synagogue’s youth group. She loves being with her youth group because she feels that it provides a perfect escape from the stress of school.

Samantha is inspired by her synagogue’s female leaders. She is passionate about women’s rights, standing up against Antisemitism, racial equity, LGBTQ+ rights, body positivity, and mental health advocacy. Samantha thinks that it is important to be friends with everyone. She is also concerned with destigmatizing mental illness, particularly since she struggles with depression and anxiety. Samantha plans to go to college next year. She has already checked out the Hillel on her campus.

Daniella is 16 years old. She lives with her parents and two younger siblings in a predominantly White, affluent suburb of the Pacific Northwest. She is a sophomore at her local public school. She identifies as a White, cisgender, heterosexual, secular, middle-class Jew who is figuring out her Jewish identity. Daniella attended Jewish day school from kindergarten to eighth grade at her paternal grandfather’s insistence. “He really pushed for it, and he's like, ‘I'll pay for it…I really want her to like that to, like, know where her roots are from and all that.’” There are not many Jewish students at her current school, which is a big change for her. However, some of her peers at her Jewish day school were unkind to her because her mother is not Jewish. They called her a “muggle” to indicate that she was not a real Jew, which hurt her feelings.

Daniella’s father is a non-practicing Jew with Ashkenazi heritage. Her mother is a non-practicing Catholic with Italian heritage. Daniella’s family does not belong to a synagogue, but they observe major holidays, such as Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Daniella’s parents have always supported her interest in exploring her Jewish identity. They hired a private tutor when Daniella wanted to study for her bat mitzvah. Daniella’s paternal grandfather maintains a kosher home, attends synagogue, and celebrates most Jewish holidays. Daniella credits him with being the “biggest influence for my Jewish identity.”

Daniella has experienced Antisemitism at her new school. She has been part of classroom discussions and conversations about Israel that have made her uncomfortable. Daniella and a classmate founded a Jewish Student Union to provide Jewish students with a safe space to talk about issues that are important to them. Daniella devotes most of her time to the JSU and a Jewish teen philanthropy program. She "never really realized how much my Jewish identity meant to me until I went to my local public school."

Miriam is 15 years old. She is a freshman at a charter school in the South. She lives outside a major city with her parents, her older sibling, and her grandparents. Miriam has six older half-siblings. Miriam identifies as a cisgender, lower middle-class, bisexual, Conservative Jew who is Hispanic, Native American, and Asian. Her parents do not know about her sexual identity. Miriam's parents were born in the United States. Her mother is Hispanic and Native American, and her father is Hispanic and Asian. Miriam has mostly been homeschooled by her mother due to her ADD and social anxiety. Miriam's mother thought that she needed a change this year since she was losing motivation with her schoolwork. Miriam started a new school where she is the only Jewish student. She likes it, but it can be challenging when students make ignorant comments about Jews and Israel.

Miriam's city has a small but sizable Jewish community. Miriam and her parents belong to a Conservative synagogue. She likes her rabbis and the fact that one of them is a woman. However, it is difficult for her to build relationships with her peers, who are White and middle-class. She feels that they judge her. Miriam and her parents converted to Judaism a few years ago from Messianic Judaism because they were looking for a deeper spiritual connection. Miriam's parents have always been curious about religion. They were raised Christian, but they turned to Messianic Judaism when they got married. Miriam's grandmother also decided to convert.

However, Miriam’s grandfather is “very stuck on Jesus is King.” Miriam and her parents attended services in person before COVID-19. Miriam now teaches herself about Judaism through online resources.

Miriam believes that it is important to speak out against Antisemitism and to defend Israel. She also cares about racial justice and LGBTQ+ advocacy. Miriam performs a lot of her activism online. In the future, Miriam hopes to do something where she can help people and/or animals.

Taylor is 16 years old. She identifies as White, cisgender, straight, Conservative Jew who is actively exploring her religious identity. She is particularly interested in the spiritual and ritualistic aspects of Judaism. Taylor lives with her parents and her two younger siblings, one of whom is Black, in an affluent community on the West Coast. She is a junior at a large public high school. Her parents gave her the option of attending a smaller Jewish high school, but she wanted the experience of a larger school that would challenge her in different ways. Taylor and her family recently moved from the Midwest, where she attended a Jewish elementary school and a public middle school. She and her family also lived in Israel for a year. Taylor has learned a lot from being in different school environments. At her old school, she experienced pushback from teachers when she needed to miss school for Jewish holidays. While this caused her distress, she now appreciates her Jewish difference. “I like not being so much around people exactly like me… I like feeling different and feeling and being Jewish is one of those ways.”

Taylor’s maternal great-grandmother immigrated to the United States from Germany before the Holocaust. Her maternal grandmother grew up in a religious home and decided to raise her own children with less religion. Her father’s family left Poland before the Holocaust.

He was raised in a Conservative family in the Northeast. Taylor's family keeps a kosher home. They also celebrate Shabbat each week and observe all major Jewish holidays.

Taylor participates in a mentoring program where she helps local middle schoolers with their homework. She is also involved in team sports and community service initiatives that promote equity, tolerance, and understanding around racial justice issues and Israel. She also advocates against climate change and for immigration reform. She has been thinking a lot about her younger sibling's experience as a Black person and tries to be the best ally possible.

Maayan is 15 years old and a freshman at a small, private high school in the Northeast. She lives with her mother and younger sibling in a rural community. She recently moved from a larger city, where she also attended private school. Her parents divorced when she was younger, and she sees her father regularly. Maayan identifies as a cisgender, bisexual, biracial, Conservative Jew. Her mother is White and upper middle-class, and her father is Black and middle-class. Maayan's maternal ancestors immigrated to the United States from Eastern Europe in the late 1890s. Her mother experienced Antisemitism during her youth because she was the only Jewish student at her school. Her teacher made her stand outside when the class said the Pledge of Allegiance. Maayan's father is a Jew by choice who converted to Judaism before her parents were married. People sometimes question whether he is really Jewish, and this bothers Maayan.

Maayan's family has belonged to Reform and Conservative synagogues. People constantly ask her questions about her identity. "Like a lot of older members at my old *shul* would just, like, come up to me and ask me, like, where I come from." This makes her uncomfortable. Maayan is currently working toward her confirmation (completing her religious education), and she is training to become a *madricha*, or teaching assistant, at her religious school. She also participates in her synagogue's youth group.

Maayan is passionate about environmentalism, creative writing, women's rights, Judaism, BLM, gun control, astrology, and Antisemitism. People sometimes try to engage Maayan in conversations about her political views. She tries to avoid these conversations because they upset her. Maayan keeps a lot to herself because she does not like to engage in conflict.

Caroline is 18 years old. She is a senior at a private school in the Southeast. She lives in an affluent community with her parents. She also has an older sibling. Caroline identifies as a cisgender, heterosexual, upper middle-class Asian, Ashkenazi, Conservative Jew. Caroline struggles with an eating disorder and anxiety, and she goes through phases when she feels more or less in control of these issues.

Caroline was adopted from China when she was one. Her parents are White and "older." They adopted her and her sister, who is also Chinese, when they were in their mid-40s. Caroline has little interest in meeting her birth parents, but she is curious to know where she gets her features from. Caroline observes that "sometimes I forget that I'm Asian, even though everyone is so quick to know." Caroline has primarily grown up around Hispanic and/or Ashkenazi Jewish peers. She feels most connected to these communities. Her parents attempted to expose her to Chinese culture, but she does not feel connected to this identity. Caroline sees herself as an Ashkenazi Jew, and it bothers her when people question her identity. She wants to call people out when they say things to her, but she dislikes conflict.

Caroline attended a Jewish preschool. She has attended several private schools, including a Jewish day school for a brief period of her life. Caroline's family belongs to a Conservative synagogue. Caroline's mother would like the family to attend services, but her father shows little interest. Caroline fell out of touch with Judaism after her bat mitzvah. She participated in a Jewish social justice program last year, and she is now feeling more connected to her Jewish identity. Caroline participates in many community service activities. She is involved in a tutoring program where she provides academic support to students in underserved communities. She is also passionate about environmental conservation, nutrition, and BLM. Caroline plans to attend college next year.

Held by Jewish Communities

Noa is 18 years old and a senior at a public high school on the West Coast. She identifies as a White, cisgender, bisexual, upper middle-class Jew who is figuring out her religious identity. She lives with her parents and two younger siblings in a neighborhood that is within walking distance of several synagogues and kosher restaurants. Noa attended Jewish day school through the eighth grade. When it came time for high school, her parents let her decide between a Jewish high school and her local public school. She decided to attend public school because she wanted to interact with a more racially and culturally diverse group of peers. Noa currently attends a school with 6,000 students. She estimates that about half of her classmates are Black and/or Hispanic. Changing schools made her feel like "I had something that made me really special in a way."

Noa's family practices a warm and open style of Judaism. Her family belongs to a Conservative synagogue and a progressive *minyan* (prayer space). Their door is always open to strangers who need a place for a holiday meal. Her parents have always encouraged her and her siblings to find their own paths to Judaism. She and her siblings attend different Jewish summer camps and participate in Jewish activities of their choosing. Noa is active in a Jewish youth group, and she participates in coexistence activities with Jews and Muslims. She is also involved with diversity initiatives at her school.

Noa’s family is mostly of Eastern European descent, though she believes that she has some Middle Eastern ancestry. Social activism is rooted in Noa’s family history. Her maternal grandfather was a Freedom Rider, and her paternal grandmother was an early Zionist. Noa’s parents continue to uphold these values through their own social justice work. Noa cares deeply about racism, human rights, and climate change. She and a classmate started a human rights initiative at school. The group became unwieldy, and Noa decided to step back from it in order to preserve her mental health. Noa is trying to figure out how to navigate her privilege and also be heard in activist spaces as a White Jewish person. She plans to attend college next year.

Leora is 16 years old. She is a junior at a Jewish high school on the West Coast. She identifies as a Conservative, cisgender, heterosexual, middle-class, multiethnic Jew with Eastern European and Filipino heritage. She lives with her mother near a major city. Leora’s father passed away a few years ago from an illness. She has two half-siblings from her mother’s previous marriage. Leora’s paternal grandparents are Orthodox. They live nearby and have had a major influence on her upbringing. They immigrated to the United States from Czechoslovakia and Hungary before the Holocaust. Leora spends a lot of time with them.

Leora used to attend a modern Orthodox day school. Her grandparents were active supporters of the school. Leora did not feel comfortable in the learning environment, and her family switched to a pluralistic school. Leora likes being in an environment where she is exposed to a diversity of opinions and different kinds of people. Leora was “not the girl to wear skirts and long sleeves. Like, that was not for me.”

Leora's mother was raised Catholic. She also lost her father at a young age. She is a Jew by choice and began the conversion process before Leora was born. However, she did not complete it until after Leora was born, so they converted together. Leora and her mother still celebrate Christmas with Leora's maternal grandmother, who lives nearby. Leora and her mother belong to a Conservative synagogue. They attend services whenever possible. She and her mother light Shabbat candles each week. They also celebrate holidays with her paternal grandparents. Leora feels that "every aspect of my life has regarded Judaism." She is involved in a Jewish youth group. She also attends a Jewish overnight camp. Most of her friends are Jewish. This year, she is participating in a Jewish social justice program. Leora is interested in meeting other non-White Jews, particularly since she is the only multi-ethnic person at her school. She is passionate about climate change, racial equity, art, and feminism.

Camila is 15 years old. She is a freshman at a public high school in the Northeast that is racially and culturally diverse. She lives near a major city with her parents and her two siblings. Camila identifies as a cisgender, mixed-race, middle-class, biromantic/asexual Reform Jew. Camila's friends are mostly White. She does not speak Spanish, and she felt rejected by her Spanish-speaking peers when she was younger.

Leticia, Camila's mother, has Puerto Rican and Jamaican ancestry. She is a Jew by choice who converted to Judaism as an adult. However, she later found out that she had some Jewish heritage. Camila has never met her biological father, but she believes that he is a mix of Black, Hispanic, and White. Sandra, Camila's other mother, grew up in an Ashkenazi family in the Northeast. Sandra's grandmother left Poland before the Holocaust. However, they lost several family members who stayed behind. When the family first arrived in America, they were so poor that they used napkins instead of yarmulkes to cover their heads— a tradition Camila's family continues to practice to this day.

Camila is involved in the Jewish club at her school. She is also a member of the theater club and the Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA). However, she feels most at home at her synagogue. Camila is a *madricha* (assistant teacher) at her synagogue's religious school, and she participates in the high school program. She is also involved in the youth group and the social justice program. She used to dislike religious school, but her attitude changed when she began to study for her bat mitzvah. She found that she really enjoyed studying religious texts. She now attends the synagogue's text study program fairly regularly. Camila is one of few Jews of Color at her synagogue. Sometimes she likes sharing her experience with her peers, though at other times she wants them to know that she is just like them. Camila is passionate about LGBTQ+ equality, racial justice issues, and equality for all people.

Morgan is 17 years old and a junior at a magnet school in the South. She lives near a major city with her parents and her younger sibling. Morgan has attended a few different schools, including a private school and a charter school. Morgan was bullied at her former school, and this was a traumatic experience for her. Morgan identifies as a White, upper middle-class, cisgender, Reform Jew who is figuring out her sexual identity.

The area where Morgan lives is predominantly White and Christian. She explains, "There's definitely less knowledge about Judaism here. Like, if you bring up you're Jewish, people will touch you and be like, 'God bless you,' sometimes." Morgan and her family belong to a small Reform synagogue. She was confirmed last year, and she now helps at her synagogue's religious school. When Morgan was younger, she and her family lived in a city with a larger Jewish population. She looks back on her time there with fondness and hopes to return someday, perhaps for college.

Morgan's family came to the United States from Russia and Poland many generations ago. Her grandmothers were best friends in elementary school. There is a range of religious practice in Morgan's extended family; some members are Orthodox, while others are non-practicing Jews. Social activism is important to Morgan. She is involved in a Jewish youth group that "has a huge social action presence, which I really love." Morgan cares about the environment, women's reproductive rights, religious pluralism, voting rights, and speaking out against Antisemitism. Morgan feels a lot of pressure from school. She works at a job, serves on the board of her youth group, and takes several Advanced Placement (AP) courses.

Ella is 17 years old and a junior at her local high school. She is a White, heterosexual, cisgender, Reform Jew who lives in a suburb in the Midwest. Though the area where she lives has a large Jewish population, most people in Ella's town are Christian, White, and politically conservative. While there are a few other Jewish students in Ella's school, she is typically the only one who speaks up against Antisemitism. Ella wishes that her friends could understand some of the struggles she encounters as a Jewish student.

Ella's parents are divorced. Ella's father is upper middle class, and her mother is lower middle class. Her father is remarried to a woman who is Christian. She has a child who is Ella's age. Ella also has two siblings. Ella alternates between her parents' different homes. Ella's mother has a physical disability, but she is able to work. Ella struggles with anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

Ella and her mother belong to a small Reform synagogue. Ella attended religious school there from first through eighth grade. She became involved in her synagogue's youth group after her bat mitzvah. Ella feels a strong sense of community with her synagogue peers. Ella also attends a Jewish overnight camp. She struggles financially compared to most of her friends. Ella relies on scholarships to pay for camp and most youth group activities.

Ella is involved with many different activities. She feels like “everyone knows a different part of me… like they don't even know about, like, my seven other personalities.” Ella leads a mental health initiative at her school. She also plays sports and works with a Jewish teen philanthropy program. Ella also leads a feminist group for Jewish girls with one of her friends. Ella is inspired by her maternal grandmother, who immigrated to the United States from Russia when she was 13, and her mother’s aunt, a 96-year-old Holocaust survivor who spent time in Auschwitz. Ella is “determined to help as many people as possible.”

Olivia is 17 years old and a senior at a public school. She lives in a predominantly White, politically moderate, and overwhelmingly Christian suburb in the Midwest. Olivia identifies as a cisgender, heterosexual, racially mixed, Reform Jew who is “White passing.” Her parents divorced when she was in the fifth grade, and she has lived “two completely different lives” since then. Olivia’s mother is White and upper middle class, and her father is Black and middle class. She has an older sibling who is in college. Her father remarried a few years ago. His wife has two younger children, whom Olivia considers to be part of her family. Olivia’s parents live close to one another, and she rotates between their houses every few days.

Olivia’s maternal ancestry can be traced back to Russia, Poland, and other parts of Europe. Her grandparents are both Jewish, and they attended each other’s b’nai mitzvot. Olivia notes that “Judaism comes up in a lot of conversations [with them].” Her maternal grandfather owned his own business, which enabled him to provide a comfortable lifestyle for his family. Olivia’s father was also raised in the Midwest. He is the descendant of slaves. Olivia’s grandparents live in the South. She believes that they acquired their house from a former slave owner, who gave it to a member of her family.

Judaism plays a major role in Olivia's life. She attended religious school as a child. Her family went to high holiday services and occasionally observed Shabbat. After her bat mitzvah, Olivia decided that she wanted to continue her Jewish education. She serves on her youth group's leadership team. "I push it on every single person I know because it truly allowed me to shape my Jewish identity." Olivia also goes to a Jewish overnight camp. She is passionate about social justice, racial equity, body positivity, and equal rights. Olivia has been thinking about her identity as a person of color and advocating for her identity within her Jewish communities. Olivia also participates in sports through her school. She plans to attend college next year.

Israeli Activism

Mia is 18 years old. She lives with her parents and younger sibling on the outskirts of a major city in the southeast. Mia is a senior at a public school, where she is one of the few Jewish students. Mia identifies as "Jewish, like, first and foremost." She also identifies as White, cisgender, middle class, and queer. Mia identifies as a Conservative Jew, but she thinks that she may become more religious in the future. Mia is the most observant person in her family. Her family's style of Judaism feels "like, we sit down at the meal for like two minutes and then somebody gets in a fight, I mean it's like, that's pretty Jewish." Her father refers to religion as "magic," and her mother did not attend religious school as a child.

Mia holds both Ashkenazi and Sephardic ancestry. Her father is Ashkenazi, and her mother is both Sephardic and Ashkenazi. However, she knows very little about her Sephardic heritage. She knows that her grandmother's family lived in Turkey, Egypt, Rhodes, Israel, and Spain before moving to South Africa, where Mia's mother was born. Mia is eager to connect with this aspect of her heritage. She has started to listen to Sephardic music and cook Sephardic foods.

Racial equity and climate change are important to Mia. She participates in a racial justice program through her local Jewish federation. She also started a Jewish Student Union at her school and a coalition for Jewish students and students of color. Mia has also participated in Jewish youth groups and Jewish summer camps. She cares a lot about Israel and identifies deeply with the progressive Zionist movement. Mia has participated in several difficult conversations with peers about Israel and Zionism. However, she feels that people don’t want to listen to what she has to say. Mia hopes to spend next year in Israel. Her maternal grandmother and great uncle were born there, and her great uncle served in the Israeli army.

Shira is 18 years old and a senior at a public high school on the West Coast. She attended Jewish day school from kindergarten through eighth grade. Shira identifies as a cisgender, heterosexual, Sephardic, upper middle-class, Persian Jew who is figuring out her religious identity. She lives in an affluent community with her parents and her younger sibling. Shira has three older siblings, all of whom are either in college or married. The community where she lives is predominantly White, but it also has a large Persian Jewish population. Shira is a first-generation American. Her parents immigrated from Iran when they were teenagers. Her father endured a temporary separation from his family because of the revolution. Shira’s mother’s family left Iran in stages. She and her siblings were separated for five years, and they went through seven different countries before they reached the United States.

Religion is important to Shira’s family. Shira’s father became religious as an adult. He takes pleasure in studying each week’s torah portion, and he wakes up early to attend synagogue each day before work. He is *shomer Shabbat*, and he has conservative views about religion and politics. Shira’s mother is less religious than Shira’s father. Shira’s family belongs to two synagogues, both of which are Orthodox. Shira was not allowed to read torah for her bat mitzvah, but her parents let her have a big party. Now that Shira is older, her parents are giving her more freedom over her religious practice.

Shira loves Israel and feels a strong allegiance to the country. She claims that “the amount of, like, dedication I feel to Israel is insane. Like, I'm dying to go to the army, but my dad doesn't believe in that. Pretty much like my entire identity, I think at my school is like, I'm known as the Israel girl. I love that.” Shira serves as an ambassador for a program that challenges negative propaganda about Israel, and she is also involved in a program that provides support to Israeli soldiers. She also plays team sports for her school. She hopes to attend college next year.

Alexandra is 17 years old. She lives in an affluent community on the West Coast with her parents and her younger sibling. She is a senior at a charter school that serves a diverse range of students. Her school’s choir sings Hanukkah songs at their annual holiday performance. Alexandra attended a Jewish day school through the eighth grade. She identifies as a “White-passing,” cisgender, heterosexual, upper middle-class, Conservative Jew. Alexandra 75% Ashkenazi and 25% Latina.[90] It bothers Alexandra when people fail to recognize her as a Latina.

Alexandra’s mother’s side of the family is from Ecuador and Argentina. Her maternal grandfather, who is Jewish, immigrated to America from Argentina. His family was originally from Eastern Europe, but they left before the Holocaust. Her maternal grandmother, who is Catholic, was raised in Ecuador. Alexandra’s father comes from a long line of greatly revered rabbis and thinkers, whose family lineage was disrupted by the Holocaust. Her paternal grandfather (who is now deceased) immigrated to America from Hungary after the Holocaust. He was able to evade capture by the Nazis by joining the army and working in a labor camp. Alexandra’s paternal grandmother died before she was born. She was a Holocaust survivor.

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[90] She refers to herself as a White Latina and refrains from calling herself Latinx because she believes that the term is a reaction from White-leftist culture rather than from the community itself.

Alexandra is passionate about music, politics, science, Jewish studies, economic policy, speaking up against Antisemitism, and Israel. Her interest in Zionism and Judaism were ignited by a former love interest; while the love did not last, her commitment to Israel and her Jewish identity did. Alexandra is currently involved in seven Israel-related clubs and programs. She identifies as a progressive Zionist, and she loves to argue with people about Israel. She is also part of an anti-racist initiative at her school. Alexandra plans to attend college next year.

Speaking Up

Sivan is 17 years old. She is a senior at a Jewish high school. Sivan has always attended Jewish day schools. She lives on the West Coast in an affluent community with her parents and her younger sibling. Sivan identifies as a cisgender, straight, upper middle-class Jew with Ashkenazi and Sephardic heritage. Sivan's father’s family is from Morocco; he was raised in Canada in the Orthodox tradition. Her mother’s family immigrated to the United States from Russia several generations ago. Sivan feels more connected to her Ashkenazi side than her Sephardic side.

Sivan was raised Conservative. She recently went through a process where she was exploring her religious identity. For a while, she practiced modern Orthodoxy. Several of her friends were moving in this direction, and she decided to join them. She explains, “I just wanted something a little bit different.” While she found that there were many beautiful aspects to this style of practice, she was uncomfortable with the different roles for men and women. She realized that “I would rather be leading a service than sitting through it.”

Sivan is involved in several Jewish activities, both as a leader and a participant. She attended a Jewish overnight camp for several years. She also works as a *madricha* (teaching assistant) at her synagogue. Sivan has also worked to shift the culture of her school around its position on Israel. She challenged the administration because she felt that it was anti-Zionist. She pushed for students to have opportunities to engage in open dialogue about Israel. She also leads an egalitarian *minyan* for students. Outside of school, Sivan speaks up about sexism and misogyny in Jewish spaces. She also participates in a feminist program for Jewish adolescent girls. Sivan plans to attend college next year.

Anna is 15 years old and a sophomore at a selective enrollment high school. She lives in a midwestern city with her parents and her younger sibling. Anna identifies as a queer, cisgender, White-passing, middle-class, Conservative Jew. Anna’s family relied on food stamps for a few years when her father was unemployed and her mother was a student. This was an eye-opening experience for her that made her understand how difficult it is to be poor.

Anna’s mother is an Ashkenazi Jew who was raised in a culturally Jewish home. Both sides of her family immigrated to the United States from Russia and Poland in the early 1900s. Not everyone was able to make it, and they lost several family members in the Holocaust. Anna’s father is a Sephardic Jew who was raised in an Orthodox home. He was born in Puerto Rico, but his family moved to the West Coast when he was young. His family is Turkish and Cuban.

Anna comes from a family of activists. She is “fully going in line with everything they taught me [her parents and grandparents] when I do activism things.” From the time that she was little, her mother talked to her about social justice issues and brought her to picket lines and protests. Anna remembers going to a “play-in” so that kids could have more playtime at school.

Anna’s family belongs to a Conservative synagogue, and they maintain a kosher home. Anna misses school for Jewish high holidays and for lesser-known holidays such as *Shavuot* (which commemorates when Jews received the ten commandments at Mt. Sinai). She attends an *egalitarian minyan* (prayer service equally led by men and women), where she likes to lead services.

There are several Jewish students at Anna’s school. However, she is the most outspoken about her politics and identity. Anna is passionate about LGBTQ+ rights, speaking up against police brutality, registering people to vote, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, immigrant rights, racial justice, feminism, and prison reform. Anna leads activist programs for her synagogue youth group.

Rachel is 18 years old. She lives in an affluent suburb with her parents and her twin sibling. She is a senior at a public high school in the Midwest, where the majority of her peers are White and Christian. Rachel identifies as a White, cisgender, queer, upper middle-class Jew who is both Conservative and Humanistic. It can be difficult for Rachel to navigate her identities as a Jewish queer student at her school. Rachel feels that “I could blend in with anyone else, and so, in that way, I'm very privileged, but then I have, like, the outsider mentality of acknowledging the fact that I don't fit in.”

Rachel's family's religious practices are largely influenced by her mother, who grew up with more religion than her father. Rachel’s maternal grandmother is a Holocaust survivor who was born in Hungary. She went into hiding as an infant, only to be reunited with her biological parents (Rachel’s great-grandparents) when she was six years old. Her family eventually moved to the United States, where they started a new life together. Rachel thinks that her family has been impacted by generational trauma due to this experience.

Mental health treatment and advocacy are important to Rachel. She lives with depression and anxiety. She feels that “in certain ways… my childhood was taken away from me, because I had to deal with those problems.” She is in a good place now and feels that “if I don't talk about it, then it gets stigmatized, so I can talk about it, and that allows other people to talk about it. Then, you know, if I can change that narrative a little bit, that's really important.” Rachel volunteers with several initiatives to make mental health services available to teens of all races and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Rachel has struggled to find a sense of place in the Jewish community due to the emphasis on heteronormativity and hooking up. Rachel works as an assistant teacher at her synagogue’s religious school. She plans to attend college next year.

Tova is 18 years old and a senior at a Jewish high school. She identifies as White, cisgender, heterosexual, upper middle-class, and modern Orthodox, though she struggles with gender issues in Orthodoxy. She lives with her parents and three siblings near a city in the Midwest. She and her family have lived in a few different cities, and she has always attended Jewish day schools. Tova’s family is of Eastern European descent. Tova’s father was raised modern Orthodox, and her mother became more religious when she married Tova’s father. Both of Tova’s parents work in social justice fields in the Jewish community.

Several years ago, Tova’s family was planning to make *aliyah* (move to Israel). During this time, Tova was diagnosed with a life-threatening illness. Her medical team recommended that she receive treatment in the United States. She was in the hospital for a long time and needed to be in isolation. Tova got better, but she relapsed again two years later. She is healthy now, but the treatment left her with cognitive delays and a visual impairment. She continues to go for yearly scans to ensure that she is healthy. Tova is now involved in charity work to help children with life-threatening illnesses. Her brush with death and watching others die made her question her own faith.

Tova is involved in a Jewish youth movement, interfaith work, and a teen philanthropy program. She also cares about LGBTQ+ rights, feminism, and advocacy for Israel. Tova recently moved from a progressive city to one that is more conservative. Tova thinks that “all people should be included and feel safe.” Tova thinks women in her community should be able to read from the torah. She is also trying to start a GSA at her school, but she is receiving resistance from the administration. Tova is used to coming up against resistance to create more inclusive communities, but she is committed to pushing her ideas forward. Tova hopes to spend time in Israel before she attends college.

Laila is 16 years old and a sophomore at a public high school. She identifies as a biracial, cisgender, heterosexual, middle-class, Reform Jew. She lives on the outskirts of a rural community in the Northeast with her mother, and her maternal grandparents live next door. She has never met her father. She believes that he is in prison. Most people in her community are White and Christian, and there is a lot of poverty. Laila’s mother is White, and her father is Black. Laila’s grandparents and her mother are Jews by choice. They were drawn to Judaism because of its values. Laila’s grandmother was raised Christian, but she never felt accepted by the faith. Laila explains, “She was searching for something, and then she found Judaism.” The entire family converted to Judaism before Laila was born.

Laila used to attend religious school at a synagogue near her home. She did not feel accepted by her peers, who were White and financially privileged. She stopped attending after a few years. Laila now participates in a virtual teen text study program with her rabbi. She has not had a bat mitzvah, but she engages in cultural celebrations, like making latkes on Hanukkah with her family. Laila is the only Jewish student at her school. Some of her peers call her a “Jewish princess” because she takes vacations with her family.

Laila is part of an activism club for students of color at her school. She is not afraid to say what’s on her mind, even if she gets in trouble for it. She gets dress coded all the time, but she wears what she wants anyway. Laila and her peers recently organized a BLM protest in her town that was attended by more than 500 people. Laila is a strong advocate for Antisemitism, feminism, racial justice, and more. She wishes that more people could understand what it is like to navigate life as a Jew of Color.

Dafna is 18 years old and a senior at a public high school that is nestled within the liberal hub of the Midwest. She identifies as Filipino, cisgender, bisexual, Reform Jew. Dafna lives with her parents and her younger sibling (she also has two adult half-siblings from her father’s first marriage). Dafna has lived in Europe and Asia. The community where she lives is predominantly White and middle class. There are only a few Jewish students in her school. Dafna feels that her identity is a bit of a paradox. “I'm too Jewish to be where I live, but not Jewish enough to be in Jewish spaces.”

Dafna’s mother is a non-practicing Catholic from the Philippines. She went through the conversion process but did not complete it. However, she knows more about Judaism than Dafna’s father. Dafna’s father is a “typical Brooklyn Jew” who grew up disconnected from religion. His family immigrated to the United States from Eastern Europe a long time ago. At one time, the family was very religious. She knows that one of her great-great-grandfathers founded a synagogue. Dafna has family members “of literally every religion.” She has family members who are Muslim, Christian, and Orthodox.

Dafna attended religious school as a child, but most of her exposure to Judaism is self-driven. When she lived in Asia, she was part of an international youth group. She and her peers met a few times a year to talk about issues such as Jewish identity, faith, and politics. Dafna cares about LGBTQ+ rights, gun control, feminism, women’s rights, Antisemitism, climate change, racial justice, and “everything in between, because most of it affects me anyways.” Dafna believes that it is important to speak her mind, no matter what the consequences. She comes up against many barriers due to her intersectional identities. She wishes that her friends could understand some of the challenges she faces due to her interlocking identities. Dafna plans to attend college next year.

Claudia is 17 years old and a senior at a public high school on the West Coast. She lives in an upper-middle-class neighborhood with her parents. She has an older sibling who is in college. Claudia identifies as having “mixed heritage.” She is White, cisgender, and upper middle class. She is also an interfaith, Reform, Latinx, heterosexual Jew. Claudia’s mother was raised Catholic, but she identifies as an atheist. Her grandfather is from Spain, and her grandmother was from Venezuela. Claudia’s father is an Ashkenazi Jew whose ancestors are from Lithuania and Ukraine. He was raised in the Midwest by activist parents. Claudia’s paternal grandfather worked as an army doctor during World War II, and her grandmother was a social worker.

Claudia attended a Jewish preschool, and she had a bat mitzvah. Her family belongs to a Reform synagogue, and they celebrate most Jewish holidays. Her family mostly connects to Jewish tradition around food. Claudia grew up feeling alienated from her Latinx identity. While she has cousins in Spain, it is difficult for her to communicate with them because she doesn't speak Spanish. In middle school, she was bullied by a group of Spanish-speaking peers because they didn't see her as Hispanic. She felt shut off from this identity. She explains: "There's no part of me that questions that I am Jewish, like I know that. So, like, I really wanted to spend time thinking about, like, what does it mean to be Latinx? What does it mean to be Hispanic?"

When Claudia entered high school, she became involved with the multicultural club at her school, and she took literature courses on Latin American literature. She began to form friendships with peers who were also exploring their multicultural identities. Claudia also participates in a program for Jewish multicultural youth, and she plays on several sports teams. She plans to attend college next year.

Themes about Girls in the Sample

The table below summarizes information about participants based on the ways they described themselves.

Table 1

Summary of Participant Information

Name	Age	Location	Race	Ethnicity	Religious Identity	Sexual Identity	Gender	Identity Category
Alaina	16	NE	W	Uzbekistani, Belarusian, Israeli, Ukrainian	JJ & FIO	Questioning	Cisgender	CS
Alexandra	17	WC	W	Latina	C & FIO	Hetero	Cisgender	JI
Amira	17	SE	ME	Israeli	C & Q	Hetero	Cisgender	RI
Anna	15	MW	W	Cuban	C	Queer	Cisgender	SU
Ariella	17	NE	W	Ashkenazi	R	Queer	Cisgender	JI
Camila	15	NE	Mixed	Hispanic, Black & White	R	Other	Cisgender	JC
Caroline	18	SE	A	Chinese	R	Hetero	Cisgender	JI

Name	Age	Location	Race	Ethnicity	Religious Identity	Sexual Identity	Gender	Identity Category
Chloe	17	WC	W	Ashkenazi and Irish	R	Hetero	Cisgender	RI
Claudia	17	WC	W	Latina	R	Hetero	Cisgender	SU
Dafna	18	MW	A	Filipino	R	Bisexual	Cisgender	SU
Daniella	16	WC	W	Ashkenazi	JJ & FIO	Hetero	Cisgender	JI
Ella	16	MW	W	Ashkenazi	R	Hetero	Cisgender	JC
Emma	17	NE	H	Colombian	R	Questioning	Cisgender	CS
Jordana	17	WC	ME	Persian	C	Hetero	Cisgender	CS
Laila	16	NE	Biracial	Black	R	Hetero	Cisgender	SU
Leora	16	WC	A	Filipino	C	Hetero	Cisgender	JC
Liana	14	WC	W	Ashkenazi	MO & FIO	Bisexual	Queer	RI
Maayan	15	NE	Biracial	Black	C	Bisexual	Cisgender	JI
Mia	17	SE	W	Ashkenazi & Sephardic	C	Queer	Cisgender	IA
Miriam	15	S	Mixed	Spanish, Native American & Chinese	C	Bisexual	Cisgender	JI
Morgan	17	S	W	Ashkenazi	R	Questioning	Cisgender	JC
Noa	18	WC	W	Ashkenazi	C & REC	Bisexual	Cisgender	JC
Olivia	17	MW	Biracial	Black	R	Hetero	Cisgender	JC
Phoebe	18	NE	W	Ashkenazi	JJ & FIO	Queer	Queer	RI
Rachel	18	MW	W	Ashkenazi	C & H	Queer	Cisgender	SU
Samantha	18	NE	W	Ashkenazi	R	Hetero	Cisgender	JI
Shira	18	WC	ME	Persian	FIO	Hetero	Cisgender	IA
Simone	17	SE	W	Russian	Q	Hetero	Cisgender	JI
Sivan	17	WC	W	Moroccan	C & FIO	Hetero	Cisgender	SU
Taylor	16	WC	W	Ashkenazi	C	Hetero	Cisgender	JI
Tova	18	MW	W	Ashkenazi	MO	Hetero	Cisgender	SU
Yael	18	SW	H	Mexican	R	Hetero	Cisgender	RI

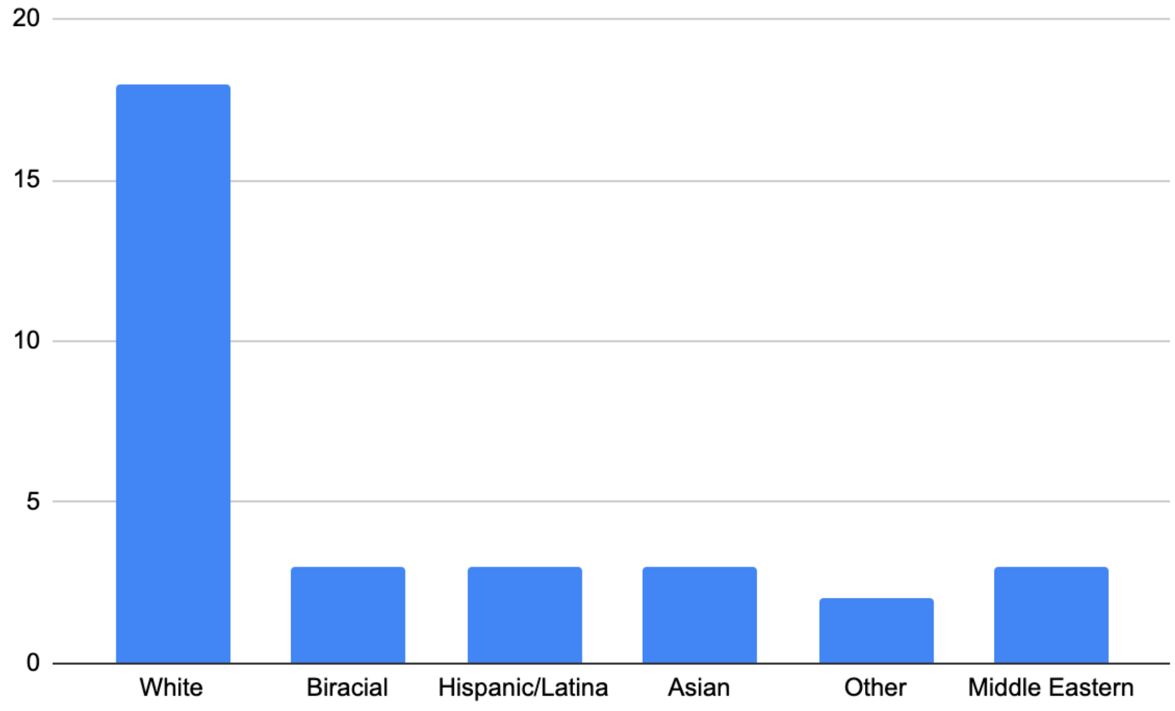
Note. For racial identity: W = White; B = Black; H = Hispanic; A = Asian; ME = Middle Eastern. For location, NE = Northeast; MW = Midwest; SE = Southeast; WC = West Coast; SW = Southwest; S = South. For Jewish identity, R = Reform; C = Conservative; MO = Modern Orthodox; REC = Reconstructionist; JJ = Just Jewish; Q = Questioning. For identity category, RI = Religious Identity; IA = Israeli Activism; SU = Speaking Up; CS = Concealment of Self; JC = Held by Jewish Communities; JI = Standing Up for Jewish Identities.

Understanding the Girls in Context

The 32 girls in the sample came from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, parts of the country, family arrangements, and religious upbringings. Eighteen identified as White, and 14 identified as non-White. Of the girls who identified as non-White, three identified as biracial, three identified as Asian, three identified as Hispanic/Latina/x, three identified as Middle Eastern, and two identified as “other”.

Figure 2

Distribution of the Participants According to Race

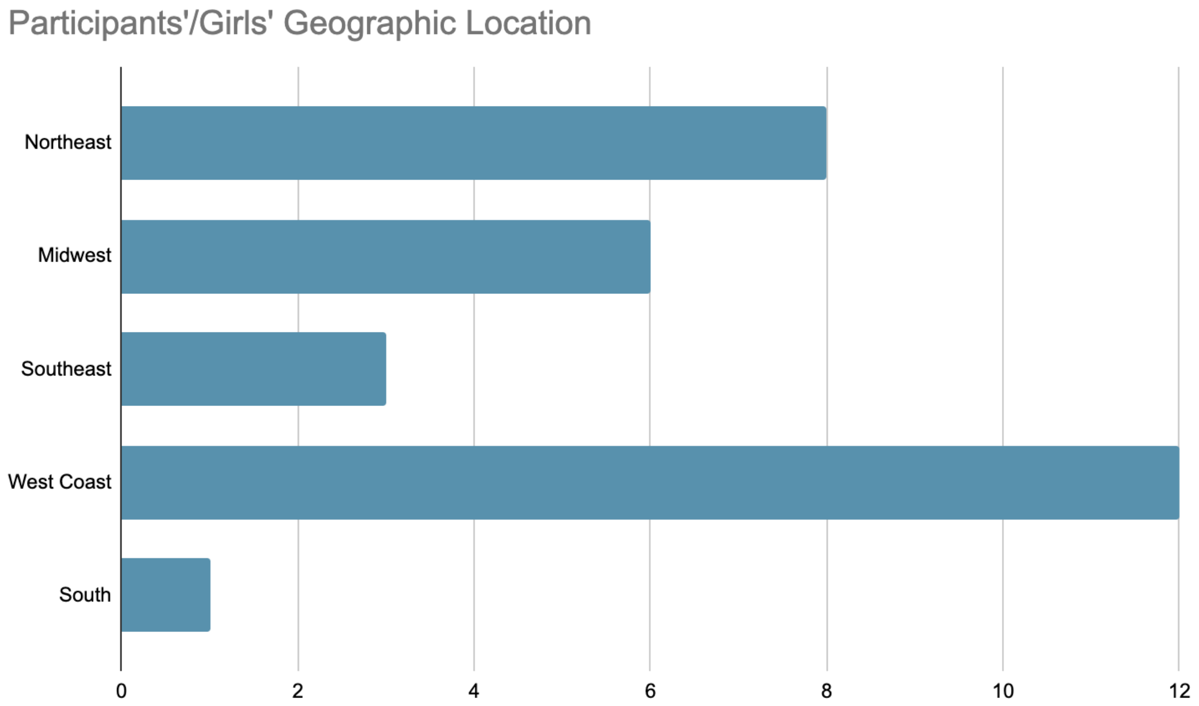


Thirty girls identified as female, and two identified as gender queer. Nineteen girls identified as straight, four identified as queer, three identified as bisexual, five identified as unknown, and one identified as biromantic asexual. Twenty-six girls, or 81%, are affiliated with at least one synagogue. Many girls identified with one or more of the Jewish denominations, including modern Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Humanistic, Reconstructionist, and undecided. Eleven girls attended Jewish day school or attended for at least some portion of their lives. Three girls attended Jewish day school for the entirety of their education.

The sample was geographically diverse. The girls lived in various parts of the country, in big cities and in small towns. Some girls lived in communities where they were part of extensive Jewish networks. They had access to Jewish peers and Jewish activities. Others lived in places where they were among the few Jewish students in their schools. The girls' geographic locations are shared in the graph below.

Figure 3

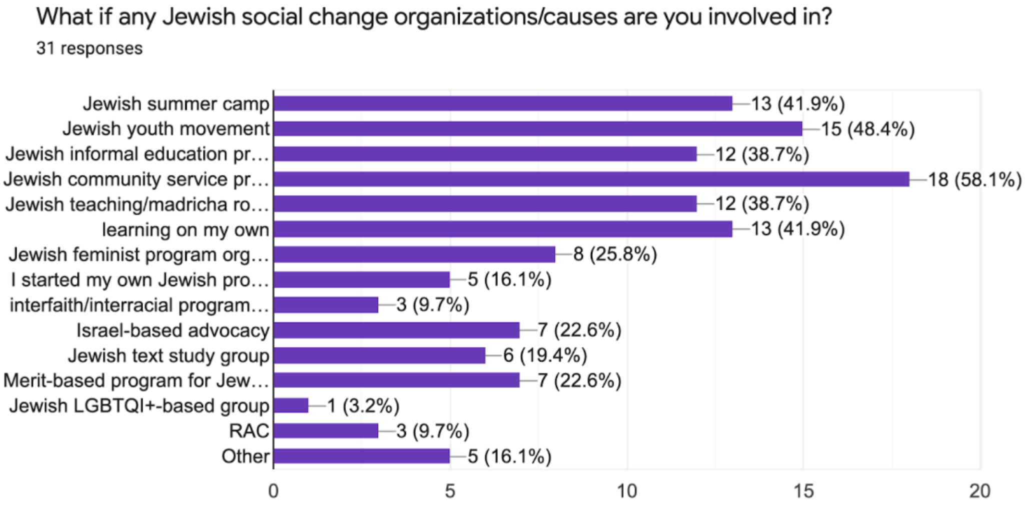
Distribution of Participants According to Geographic Location



The girls were involved in a variety of Jewish social change organizations. I use the term "social change" as an umbrella term for any Jewish activist, educational, and/or communal organization/institution that girls were involved with. This data was gathered from the Google survey. It is worth noting that girls had the option to select multiple options and to enter their own organizations and initiatives. Of the 30 girls who completed the survey, each girl checked at least one box, which indicated that they were involved with at least one Jewish social justice organization. Some of the responses included: “I am a *madricha* for young children at my shul. I also study Jewish text in my confirmation study class,” or “I help plan fun events and get involved with other Jewish youth groups.” More than half the girls (58%) indicated that they participated in some sort of Jewish community service program. While some of these programs were local to their synagogues and/or federations, others participated in programs that were sponsored by Jewish feminist organizations, Israeli advocacy organizations, and Jewish social justice organizations.

Figure 4

Participants’ Responses Regarding Involvement in Jewish Social Change Organization/Causes



The girls indicated that they centered their advocacy on Israel, feminism, teen philanthropy, LGBTQ+ issues, special needs, and Antisemitism. Some shared: “I co-founded and am the current president on my school’s Jewish Student Union”, or “I volunteered at an organization for Jewish kids with special needs. I was a junior counselor there for a couple weeks in the summer."

During the interviews, the majority of girls shared that they became *b'not mitzvah* when they were 12 or 13. Four girls/participants (i.e., Miriam, Shira, Phoebe, and Laila) had not. As the Figure 4 shows, more than one third of the girls were participating in either informal Jewish learning programs or independently learning of their own. However, each girl's learning trajectory and participation in Jewish life were unique. It was shaped by a number of contributing factors, including her Jewish upbringing— that is, whether she was raised within the context of Jewish institutions; for example, whether she attended synagogue and/or religious school when she was younger and how she felt about this experience; what Jewish life was like around her— if she was surrounded by Jewish peers and a sizeable Jewish community; and the options that were available to her— for example, camps, youth groups, and/or other programs. This largely depended on where she lived and the choices her family made about whether and how to integrate Judaism into their lives.

Israel

Other factors worth mentioning include girls' identification with Israel. Many were developing a more complex understanding of Israel's complicated relationship with Palestinians and wrestling with their feelings. While the girls claimed to have varying levels of knowledge and familiarity when it came to discussing Israel's politics and history, their overwhelming support and concern for Israel's well-being was apparent. The girls identified across the spectrum of political belief; some adopted the label "progressive Zionist," while others felt that they did not know enough about the country and its history to form an opinion. Some girls, like Alexandra, were involved in multiple Israel-oriented clubs and activities. For example, she took classes on advanced topics such as military tactics in Israel. She explained, “I really feel confident in my knowledge about Israel and Zionism. I think that the Jewish programs that I've been a part of have really, really, really contributed to that.” Noa, on the other hand, took Arabic and participated in multiple co-existence groups with Muslim peers.

Some girls had Israeli parents and/or other relatives who lived there, and they felt a deep connection to the land. This suggests that Jewish institutions and/or people can serve as powerful agents for fostering a sense of Zionism in girls. Mia feels that her heritage is undeniably Israeli. Amira’s father was born in Israel, and she feels that it is a necessary refuge for Jews. Some girls, like Olivia, were careful to separate their connection to Israel from the present conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Olivia explains that:

> When it comes to like, conversations about Israel and everything going on there, I truly tend to back off because I don't know all the information. So, I'm not going to have an argument or like, push something that I don't have all the facts or information about.

This suggests that girls are trying to figure out their relationship with Israel and where to position themselves in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, it is worth noting that this population of girls overwhelmingly identified with caring about Israel. This might not have been the case with other Jewish girls, who could have been anti-Zionist or unfamiliar with Israel.

Class

An overwhelming percentage of girls in the sample, 88% (*n* = 29), identified as middle-class or upper middle class, which supports data from the Pew Research Center (2020) report, *Jewish Americans in 2020*, regarding American Jews enjoying a higher standard of living than the average population. I collected this data by asking girls to report their social class during the interviews. Most girls had a clear understanding of the way that the class system worked and their class standing. If they needed guidance, I explained class differences to them and gave them different options: poor, working class, lower middle class, middle class, upper middle class, and wealthy. The girls' self-reported rates exceed those of the Pew survey, which shows that "half of U.S. Jews described their financial situation as living "comfortably" (53%), compared with 29% of all U.S. adults" (Pew Research Center, 2020a, p. 48). This could have been due to the small sample size or the fact that the Pew study also included members of elderly households, who generally have less income than the general population, and Orthodox Jews, whose earnings are lower than those of Reform and/or Conservative Jews. The girls who identified as lower middle-class felt othered by this experience, and it is something that I discuss in Chapter Six. Another participant seemed hesitant to share that her family identified as upper middle class. She felt the need to explain that her family worked hard for their money, which suggests that class and assumptions about it play a salient role in girls' lives.

Political Affiliation

While I did not ask girls about their political affiliation, many girls indicated that they held liberal views on matters pertaining to Israel, race, women's rights, LGBTQ+ matters, and helping those in need, which is another marker of distinction. A few girls, like Samantha, Morgan, Yael, Tova, and Ella, pointedly declared that they were Democrats. Noa described herself as a "progressive thinker". Several others, such as Rachel, Claudia, Noa, Dafna, Phoebe, Maayan, Laila, and Anna, designated themselves as politically liberal. Others, like Alaina, claimed to "lean more towards progressivism," but when it came to money, she was "fiscally conservative." Alexandra described herself as being in the "purple quadrant" since she is "socially liberal [and] fiscally conservative in some ways." These findings are consistent with larger trends in American Jews' political affiliation. According to the Pew Research Center

(2020), 75% of American Jews identify as Democrats or Democrat-leaning. These surveys also demonstrate that political and religious affiliations are predictive of more socially conservative and more right-wing views on Israel, with Orthodox Jews skewing toward the center-right (Pew Research Center, 2020a).[91] One participant, Amira, who was raised in a more traditional household, endorsed these findings:

> I mean, if you're very strong pro-Israel you likely voted for Trump because he was very pro-Israel, while the other side is more pro-Palestine. Who has done more for Israel than Trump has? At the end of the day, it's just the fact, whether you like it or not, I mean....

Zakai (2022), who has written extensively on the way that young people develop and negotiate their relationship with Israel, observes that today's youth are growing up in a context where "discussions of Israel-related politics have become so contentious that Israel now sits as *the* primary source of intracommunal strife within the American Jewish community" (p. 10). This can create a polarizing climate for young people, who have different visions and understandings of what the relationship between the United States and Israel should look like.

Summary

The goal of this chapter was to introduce the reader to the girls/individuals who participated in the study and contextualize their lives. In doing so, it made visible the 32 Jewish girls'/individuals' rich and multi-varied experiences, their life histories, their family contexts, their relationship with Judaism, their activism, and more. Centering the details of their lives is essential to a project of this nature, which is constructed in partnership with girls, with their words and their knowledge. In the next chapter, Chapter Five, I share the joys, challenges, and struggles Jewish activist girls experienced as they strived to feel heard, seen, supported, and validated. I provide a concept map (see Appendix J) to explain how I arrived at my findings and offer a theoretical framework for explaining how Jewish activist girls navigated their relationship to voice, visibility, and representation in multiple contexts.

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[91] Twenty percent of Orthodox Jews identified as Democrats, compared to 80% of Reform Jews, and 70% of Conservative Jews (Pew Research Center, 2020a).

Chapter 5: Findings

In this chapter, I share five themes, several sub-themes and dimensions within the sub-themes to describe the various tensions, challenges, and moments of celebration that the Jewish activist girls in the study experienced as they navigated their daily lives and endeavored to create a better world. The findings demonstrate how Jewish activist girls are actively engaged in the task of identity development, and the messiness that comes with this work. The findings are based on my interpretation of how the girls communicated their thoughts and perceptions about the intricacies of their daily lives. These were made visible through a qualitative research design process and a grounded theory analysis. While each finding can stand alone to describe an aspect of how Jewish activist girls in the study navigated their relationship to voice, visibility and representation, the findings are highly interrelated.

Grounded theory, the theoretical framework utilized in this study, emphasizes the importance of generating the theory from the “ground up.” The findings are developed from the data from the thirty-two interviews, five focus groups, and thirty surveys completed with the thirty-two study participants. They center the girls’ voices; they come from the girls themselves, from the conversations I had with them, and the conversations they had with one another during the focus groups.

The findings include:

1. Religion is important to girls, and they are trying to find their place within it.
2. Girls are making sense of Antisemitism, criticism against Israel, and navigating their personal relationships with Israel.
3. Girls are thinking about what it means to navigate the world as an identified Jew.

4. Jewish girls are making sense of their intersectional identities and understanding their unique experiences.
5. Jewish girls need connection and support.

This grounded theory study responded to the following questions (RQs) to better understand how Jewish activist girls navigated their relationship to voice, visibility, and representation:

RQ1: How do Jewish activist girls navigate their relationship to voice, visibility, and representation?

RQ2: What are the unique challenges experienced by Jewish girl activists?

RQ3: How do Jewish girl activists exercise resistance against the challenges they experience?

Five major research findings emerged from this study, each answering one of the three research questions. Finding 1 names some of the challenges faced by girls to make sense of their Jewish identities. Finding 2 describes how girls are feeling alienated and alone in the struggle to navigate Antisemitism and criticism against Israel. It also highlights how girls are developing their own personal and nuanced relationship with Israel. Finding 3 reveals how girls are thinking about their independent identity construction as Jews. Finding 4 describes how girls are making sense of their intersectional and overlapping identities. Finding 5 reveals the various and unseen ways that girls need validation and support.

Finding 1: Religion Is Important to Girls, and They Are Trying to Find Their Place Within It

The majority of girls/participants in the study were raised with religion. They were at a developmental stage where they were thinking critically about their own religious values and beliefs, particularly around God, gender, and whether the stories they had been raised on were true. As is typical for adolescence, some girls/participants were questioning their religious upbringing and thinking about what they wanted for themselves. Many of the girls' sense of activism was deeply intertwined with their Jewish identity, whether it came from an internalization of Jewish values, the desire to create a more pluralistic, equitable form of Judaism, or inequalities they experienced as a Jew that they wanted to apply to a more universal context.

Subfinding 1.1: Girls Are Wrestling with Questions around Faith and Spirituality

Several girls indicated that they were grappling with questions about God's existence, particularly when there was so much injustice in the world. Though participants were not directly asked to share their thoughts or opinions about God or spirituality, anything they shared is voluntary.

> I've always felt this like, disconnection with God. When I was younger, I actually used to like, pray every night and not like, with like, prayer, but by like, saying like, 'Hey God, here are some things that would make the world better. You know, that'd be nice. I've been a good kid.' Um, and nothing would happen, obviously. But um, so like even then, I was like, 'This is so, this is kind of weird. Why is God not a nice person?' And like, I'm sitting here reading this stuff, but I'm just being like, why are we here? Can you give any examples now? Why is He such this great being? He does these terrible things.

The statement above, from Liana, describes their frustration to understand why Jewish people are supposed to believe in God when so many things are wrong with the world. When Liana was younger, they would pray to God to ask for things, but their prayers never came true. Liana felt confused – and perhaps even angry – when God did not fit the image in their mind. They perceive Judaism as “something I have to do, but it's something that I don't completely believe in and have my full faith in, like my mom does.” Liana’s parents hired an adult mentor to answer some of their questions. Liana felt proud when they stumped them. While Liana’s feelings are a fairly typical process of outgrowing a child-like/childish view of God, they feel different from their family.

Taylor, who is Conservative, feels uneasy about her relationship with God. While she believes in the existence of a higher being, she is uncomfortable with certain aspects of the Jewish people’s relationship with God, such as the concept of chosenness – that Jews are God’s “special people.” Like Liana, she is also confused about God’s ways:

> I struggle with the God aspect. I love praying but it is a struggle for me to figure out where my prayers are going. And if they're helping, if they're not helping, if there's something out there, if there's not something out there. I believe that there's a Being, and I believe that there's faith. And through that, I think there is a God. But then, but then, there's a lot of questions from that. You know, why did God choose us? If we are all God's people, why is it so bad for a lot of people, you know? Why is there so much inequality? Like a lot of people really believe in God and they don't have proof. And it's an interesting thing to think about and I think believing brings up more questions and so that's something that I struggle with.

Taylor is looking for credible proof of God’s existence to help her understand her place in the world and to affirm her belief in God. She has trouble putting her faith in God when there is so much suffering around her. She is confused about what to believe.

Tova, who identifies as modern Orthodox, feels like her relationship with God is “so complicated it's like, always changing.” While she attributes her recovery from a life-threatening illness to “a miracle of God,” she knows many other people who have died. This makes it challenging for her to understand God’s ways:

> I'm so grateful to be alive and I'm like, ‘Oh my gosh, like this is a miracle,’ like God exists, you know, like thank God. But then like, at the same time, like you know, this five year-old girl passes away and I'm like, ‘well, that doesn't seem right’. Like that's like you know, like classic, ‘Why do good things happen to bad people?’ And like you know, we can't know God's ways and God's reasons and everything has a reason. Like, I don't know, it's just like it just doesn't sit right, and like, you know, somebody will say, ‘Well that's how it's supposed to feel.’ Like, okay like, it doesn't feel good. Like, I don't know that I totally believe that. Like, I don't know what I believe, as opposed to that. But like, I don't know. It's just so hard to tell, it's hard to like, determine what's just coincidence and what's like not.

Tova would like to place her full trust and faith in God. However, she is wary of doing so as she ponders some of life’s most existential questions and looks to assign meaning to them.

Amira, who was raised in a Conservative household, is going through a different kind of struggle, which she refers to as her “Jewish identity crisis.” She did not feel connected to religion or to God until last summer, when she went to Israel with an Orthodox youth program. There, she developed “a very spiritual connection,” which affirmed her belief in religion. When she came home, she began to practice Orthodox Judaism. She became involved in an Orthodox youth program, she became *shomer negiah*,[92] *shomer Shabbat*,[93] and she prayed each morning. She felt encouraged by her youth group peers and advisors to adopt a more religious lifestyle. Her parents became concerned by her sudden change in behavior, which confused her. "I was like, 'What do I do?' 'Do I do this,' 'Do I do that?' But I don't know." After several conversations with her parents, she learned that "my dad had kind of been pushing back because there's a really strong Orthodox community in Israel – one which is not very nice." Amira realizes that "adolescents are often referred to as naive, and oftentimes we can be, especially when it comes to things we don't really know about, and this was very new for me." Amira is still working through her religious beliefs and trying to find her identity in the process.

Caroline, who was raised Conservative, developed an "iffy relationship with Judaism" during her adolescence. She began to question the truth behind some of the stories she learned at religious school:

> I don't want to say, but we all go to that point where you realize that Moses didn't part the Red Sea, maybe the sea didn't turn red, and so, you're raised on all these stories and then I at least really believed in them, and then you take science and then things don't really make sense and then so I don't know, I just didn't really believe in Judaism.

Caroline is trying to determine what she believes. She turned her back on Judaism after her bat mitzvah because she was looking for concrete information to answer her questions about the world.

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[92] This refers to the Jewish prohibition on physical touch between members of the opposite sex unless they are married.

[93] This refers to someone who observes the rules of Shabbat, meaning they do not drive, use electricity, exchange money, or engage in other forms of work, in accordance with *halacha*.

Samantha, who is Reform, used to struggle with her feelings about God. She thought that she had to believe in God to be counted as a Jew. Over time, she came to realize that the two were not mutually exclusive:

> I struggled a lot with the idea of God and then I realized, at least for myself, you don't have to believe in God to believe in the religion. You can believe in the community and believe in everyone else, but not believe in this particular Being out there that controls the entire universe, and you don't have to pray to them either. And then I like, work[ed] for a summer with a bunch of like, powerful female renewals [at my synagogue]. And they like, opened my eyes. Like I realized I had an unconscious bias. I thought God was a 'He' because that's what everyone tells me. A lot of people have this idea and I had this idea that religion was run by men. But that's not true because there is nothing that they can prove. It's just old White men writing stories about stuff that doesn't even matter anymore. That is probably just storytelling. And it's nice to have something to believe, and it's nice to create a community around. It's nice to form hope out of something from a book, but at the end of the day, it's a book.

Samantha describes a critical moment when she realized that the Judaism she had been exposed to largely reflected male-centered values and perspectives. She was able to find new and meaningful ways to claim agency for herself as a Jew through the mentoring relationships she developed with strong and powerful women at her synagogue. Samantha was given permission to reject aspects of Judaism that she disagreed with and to make decisions that reflected her values.

Rachel, on the other hand, considers herself an atheistic Conservative Jew. Her rejection of God – a pillar of the Jewish faith – seems to promote discomfort and prevent her from fully adopting the label of Conservative Judaism:

> I'm a Conservative Jew, but I also don't believe in God. So there's always like, the weird of like, 'Yeah, I'm Conservative.' I would consider myself more religious than Reform Jews, but also, like, I question everything which I think it's like, right… it's Judaism… we question everything. Two Jews, three opinions. Right, like there are no answers, and so I think that, like that's really important about Judaism, in comparison to other Western religions.

Rather than see the issue as a function of limited ways of thinking about and/or acknowledging experience, Rachel feels burdened to locate and/or explain her spiritual beliefs. At the same time, she is grateful that Judaism gives her space to question and figure out her beliefs.

Other participants, like Phoebe, have established religious belief systems that are independent from God. Phoebe has found their own way into Judaism, and has been able to choose their beliefs. Their experience differs from Liana and Caroline, who were raised with more traditional belief systems:

> I don't believe in God, but I'm very religious. I don't know if that makes sense, but I'm like, very ritually engaged and to me, like the culture and the religion feel so deeply intertwined that I don't know that I could separate them and just like, call myself culturally Jewish, so yeah.

Several other girls expressed frustration that they had not been encouraged to think critically about God and/or religion during their upbringing. Other participants also pondered these questions, but later declared themselves agnostic.

This finding suggests that Judaism plays a significant role in the lives of girls, and they are trying to figure out what it means to them. Several girls indicated that they are trying to reconcile their spiritual beliefs and their beliefs about God. As they navigate through life's challenging events, they are looking to assign meaning to some of life's unanswerable questions. Their beliefs have been informed by their families, their life experiences, clergy and educators, and their experiences in Jewish contexts. As they journey through adolescence, they are wrestling with these questions for themselves.

Subfinding 1.2: Girls Are Questioning How Gender-Related Barriers in Traditional Judaism Could Affect Their Ability to Participate in Jewish Life

> I think I like the Orthodox way of praying. And I like the community of Orthodox, like modern Orthodox. I started going to services there because it was faster, I'll be honest. But then I was like, 'Wait a second. I like this…um, I don't know, it's a step back. You know, because women and men are separate, um and women don't have the same bat mitzvahs, but I don't know. I kind of like it. But I don't like it because of that. I prefer the equality, the gender equality of Conservative, but I like the praying style of Orthodox.

The passage above describes Taylor's struggle to navigate her beliefs around gender and its implications on girls'/women's participation in religious life. She cares about gender equality, but she prefers the Orthodox style of prayer. She wonders if she should identify as Conservative since women are afforded the same opportunities as men. Taylor is faced with a conundrum. She describes the dilemma succinctly. "In Judaism, boys have it easy. They get a bar mitzvah, no matter what. They count as a minyan, no matter what. And a lot of the laws are targeted towards them. And women have had to fight for it."

Seven girls, all of whom were either brought up in traditional homes or who had considered Orthodoxy, shared moments when their gender beliefs conflicted with their religious beliefs and/or practices, such as not being fully included in Jewish rituals and/or traditions. This posed challenges for them, because they cared deeply about Judaism, and also about gender equality. Others were angry just to know that these boundaries existed, whether or not they affected their religious practice. There were also those who did not feel as though gender posed a barrier to their participation in Jewish life. This largely depended on the religious communities girls participated in, their family's religious practice, and their feelings about gender.

Besides Taylor, two other girls, Alexandra and Sivan, experimented with modern Orthodoxy but moved away from it due a perceived lack of gender equality for women. Alexandra "dabbled" with modern Orthodoxy, but was frustrated by what she perceived as women's inferior status:

> I've dabbled. I've hung out with modern Orthodox people and they're really cool. I think modern Orthodox Jews are really cool. But I don't really like inequality between men and women. That's just something I can't live with, and I think like there are a lot of really stupid Talmudic arguments that people make for like why women can't read from the torah. And yeah, I'm glad I was raised the way I was raised.

Alexandra did not grow up with modern Orthodoxy. She tried it, but could not get comfortable with it. While she is familiar with some justifications for women's different roles, she disagrees with them. She prefers her own Conservative upbringing, where she has access to the same opportunities as men.

Sivan briefly practiced modern Orthodoxy during her freshman year in high school. The process was both meaningful and challenging for her. She liked the intimate way in which she was able to engage with prayer, but she also felt as though she needed to compromise her feminist values. She ultimately decided that the lifestyle was not for her:

> When I got to high school, I ended up gearing toward modern Orthodoxy for a year-and-a-half, in part because of like, who I became friends with. And it came from people who are on that track of becoming more religious so I ended up experimenting with it. I ended up really rejecting it. I think there's value, but I was very put off by like, a lot of the gender dynamics. At first, I thought that I could kind of turn the other cheek. Or if it was a question of what would ensure Jewish continuity versus my role as like, a woman in Judaism, I felt like I could put up with it for the sake of Jewish continuity…I could put gender aside, and that was kind of a flawed notion to begin with. I ended up realizing how problematic that thinking was… but there's something very beautiful about like, very vigorous practicing of tradition and I identified with that piece of it. It was more that there was something extreme, and that's what I began to have a problem with.

Like Alexandra, Sivan was drawn to Orthodoxy because her friends identified with it. She decided to try it out for herself. While certain aspects of the tradition appealed to her, she felt that "the idea of being kind of marginalized that way was just boring. And I would rather be leading a service than sitting through it." Sivan initially struggled with whether she needed to compromise her gender values for the sake of the Jewish People. In the end, she realized that she wanted to be part of a Jewish community where women's participation was equal to men's, and where she could assume a leadership role.

Tova's experience as a modern Orthodox Jew differs from many other girls' in the study. While she is proud of her identity, she is bothered by the lack of equality for women in her current synagogue. She has lived in other cities where women have been allowed to read from the torah and count as part of a *minyan.* While she would like to bring these ideas to her current community, she worries that others will perceive them as offensive or disrespectful:

> Here, like you know, we do have a lot more like, you know, opportunities for women. Like the women always carry a torah down the women's side and like they say *mi shaberachs* (a blessing for healing), and you know, for all the *megillot* (reading of the Purim scrolls) and you know, there’s a women’s reading on *Simchat Torah* (celebrating the rereading of the torah each year), and the women have a torah to dance with and to read from and to get *aliyot* (getting called up to make a blessing before a torah reading). But it’s still not equal, which, like you know, I'm upset about. But like I don't know like, I just don't know if that's something that, like everybody wants. It's like I don't want to push anybody into something they're not, you know, interested in.

Tova is uncertain about how people in her current community will receive her ideas. She feels that her frustration is valid because she knows of modern Orthodox communities where complete egalitarianism is practiced. However, she is hesitant to introduce these ideas to her current community because she is unsure of how they will be received.

Like Tova, Shira was also raised in a traditional home.[94] She was angry when her father refused to let her read from the torah for her bat mitzvah:

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[94] By traditional, I mean that her family is modern Orthodox. They keep the Sabbath. They are kosher in the home. They do not use electronics on Shabbat or drive. While each family decides its own practices, Shira’s family errs on the side of traditionalism, where girls are not allowed to read from the torah, where Tova’s is more egalitarian.

> I pushed for a long time. I was like excuse me, ‘I can read the same way you can read.’ Like, just because we have different genitalia doesn't mean that my reading skills are impaired. But yeah, he didn't budge on that one for whatever reason.

Shira was not entirely surprised by her father’s response. She pushed the issue for a while, but eventually gave up. Many of her female Persian friends were also not allowed to read torah for their bat mitzvahs. Rather, they celebrated with a party. She explains that “most of my [female] Persian friends were also not allowed to read torah and they had a really big party. Most of my White friends read from the torah and then had a party after.” While she regrets the opportunity, she “wasn't super upset about the fact that I wasn't allowed to because I feel like if I messed up that would have been really embarrassing.”

Subfinding 1.2a. Sexual and Gender Identity. Three participants identified (potential) structural barriers that could prevent them from accessing Jewish prayer spaces due to their sexual and/or gender identity, and ways that they were troubling these boundaries through their participation in Jewish life. One participant identified as gender queer, and two identified as queer.

Phoebe, who identifies as observant and gender queer, feels excited by the opportunity to innovate change in Judaism:

> I think my pride is not from like my ancestors, but it's rather the ability to forge my own path as a queer Jew, and you know, like make space for those who are like traditionally not really like given the space to exist. I'm also interested in being in really observant spaces, but like, for example, many of those spaces have *mechitzas* and I don't think I'm comfortable like, sitting on either side.[95]

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[95] A *mechitza* is partition that separates men from women in religious prayer spaces

They see their gender queerness as a form of activism – they want to use their experience to evolve Judaism into a more open and accepting religion. At the same time, they also indicate how the use of gender constructs in prayer spaces can impose limitations on their ability to participate in them.

Anna, who identifies as queer, feels lucky to be part of her Conservative *minyan*.[96] She gets to lead services and participate in a space where she feels fully seen. At the same time, she realizes the uniqueness of her situation. She knows that her prayer space is special and she does not take it for granted:

> One of the things I love the most about being a Conservative Jewish person is like, the services I go to are very, very traditional. Like we don't we don't have a *mechitza* or anything. We have a super traditional service. I don't know, I love it because it's like I feel like it connects me to Judaism throughout time. But, you know, like a 15 year-old lesbian with bright blue converse was leading Yom Kippur *Musaf* (a prayer that is read during the service) this year and it's just like... it's just such a great thing that I get to do that and I get to be part of both like, this very traditional side that connects me to Jews throughout time and history but also, I get to be such an important part of Judaism and I get to connect with it so much more than if I would, if I was in maybe like, Orthodox Judaism.

It is unclear if Anna feels that her ability to express herself would be limited because of her gender or her sexual orientation in a more traditional prayer spaces. However, her statement indicates that she is thinking about these issues.

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[96] A prayer space that consists of more than ten people. Minyanim are typically member-led and have their own religious orientation.

One girl, Amira, presented views that contrasted with those of other girls. Rather than feeling marginalized by gender roles in traditional Judaism, she felt that they gave her a purpose in life. She is proud of the opportunities this identity affords her. Amira was the only participant who did not identify as a feminist in the survey:

> I’m very glad to be a Jewish woman, and I feel pride in that and I don't feel that, like, the religion is sexist against me just because of what I've learned and how I've grown with Judaism. So I guess that’s different from the way some other people may perceive it.

Amira’s view is supported by other modern Orthodox women, who feel that they are given a sense of purpose as Jewish women, such as lighting the candles on Shabbat and serving as the keeper of the household (Ringel, 2007).

As suggested, girls/participants are pushing against and struggling with their beliefs about gender barriers imposed by traditional Judaism’s patriarchal design. They are questioning dominant beliefs and figuring out what they want for themselves. While this can limit their participation in Jewish life, others have found ways to innovate change and engage with Jewish life in meaningful ways. Girls/participants are serving as knowledge producers and thinking critically about their religious practice. In doing so, they are learning about themselves.

Finding 2: Making Sense of Antisemitism, Criticism Against Israel, and Navigating Their Own Personal Relationships with Israel

This finding describes how the girls discussed their experiences with Antisemitism, their experiences dealing with criticism against Israel, and their struggle to navigate their own complicated thoughts and feelings about Israel. While it represents my interpretation of what the girls said and felt, it is worth noting the many contradictions and challenges they expressed when discussing these topics. In some cases, they conflated criticism against Israel with Antisemitism, and in others, they reported hearing remarks they were in fact Antisemitic. Girls overwhelmingly felt that few people were able to recognize the complexity of their identities, particularly when they had few Jewish peers who could relate to these challenges or demonstrate empathy around them. Girls described moments when they struggled with whether to speak up out of concern of drawing attention to themselves when navigating microaggressions, Antisemitism and feelings of invisibility. These experiences made them feel uncomfortable, angry, and resentful that offending parties were not held to account. Other girls were absorbing new information about Israel's relationship with Palestinians and coming to their own conclusions about the conflict.

Subfinding 2.1: Feeling Alone in the Struggle to Defend Judaism and Israel

Girls described the unseen and ubiquitous ways Antisemitism and aggressions against Israel manifested in their school environments and how a lack of accountability from teachers and administrators made girls feel as if they had to navigate these issues on their own. They described situations where peers "teased" them with Antisemitic slurs or comments and/or made them feel uncomfortable in conversations about Israel:

> There's been multiple situations. So like, freshman year, I remember science class. We were like, measuring things outside, so we had like these rulers or yardsticks and a group of people made like a swastika out of the yard sticks. And I was just standing there. I didn't really realize stuff like this happened. It was just like happening right in front of me, and that was kind of a moment, where I was like, 'Wow, like that's really not okay, and that makes me feel really uncomfortable.' As well as other things. Like, there was a lab in a science class where there was like gas involved so people made jokes like, 'Oh, round up the Jews, gas up the Jews.' I had a friend who had swastikas constantly drawn on her paper just because she was Jewish and so, you know, eventually, she went to the

> teacher and was like, ‘A student's drawing swastikas on my paper,’ and the teacher, they just didn't do anything about it. Like, they talked to the kid one time. There was no suspension or detention or any kind of like, consequence, and so I think a lot of those situations have just like, really hit home to me and like, you know…I don't know, I guess, they just affected me and my friend, too, and so, they influenced me.

Daniella was surprised by the blatant Antisemitism she experienced when she moved from a small day school to a large public high school in the ninth grade. It showed up in several places – on her friend’s paper, in the science classroom, and the science lab. Her teachers’ failure to respond made her feel uncomfortable as a new student at her school. She felt these acts warranted some kind of punishment, and she was frustrated when the students were not reprimanded for their behavior.

Amira shared an encounter that happened during middle school when she was teased incessantly by a boy who “liked” her. “I definitely faced the most Antisemitism from this one kid. He was like, ‘Oh, you want to hear a joke – the Holocaust!’ And I was like, ‘You're not funny.’ Yeah, and then he literally looked at me and told me to go back to Auschwitz.” It is unclear how Amira determined that he “liked” her; whether this was the teacher’s interpretation of “boys being boys”, or if this was Amira’s assessment of the situation.

Subfinding 2.1a: Fear of Speaking Up. Some girls described situations where they wanted to speak up against Antisemitism and defend Israel but felt as though they needed to remain silent for fear of stoking criticism from their peers. Dafna received Antisemitic and anti-Israel comments from her Left-leaning peers when she lived abroad and attended an elite private school. “A lot of people didn't realize how Antisemitic and anti-Israel their rhetoric was.” She considers herself “a very fiery-tempered person” and realized that it was best to ignore them:

> It was awful...but I had to learn not to respond because that's why they were doing it. They wanted to see me riled up and they wanted to see me respond because that was funny, and so I just had to learn to like, ignore it, or else it would get worse.

Dafna felt that she had no other choice but to remain silent. There was no one to defend her and her peers were poking fun at her expense.

While Anna would like others to understand her unique struggle with Antisemitism, she is reluctant to bring it up with her peers:

> I feel like I'm always almost a little bit scared to bring up Antisemitism, because I don't know how someone's going to react, you know someone's going to say, 'Well, Israel's a terrible place… 'like you're so privileged to be Jewish…' or something like that. Um, I never know what someone's going to say, so I feel like it's almost way easier just to like, talk about so many other things.

Anna fears that her peers would turn the discussion against her. Instead of listening with understanding and compassion, she thinks that they would respond with reductive stereotypes and negative rhetoric against Israel. Given that she is unable to predict how her peers would respond to this sensitive topic, Anna prefers to avoid discussing it with her non-Jewish peers.

Alaina agrees. She is reluctant to share her opinions because she fears that they will be invalidated and misinterpreted by those around her. She worries that "people won't take the chance to get to know me. They're going to assume that I think in a very linear way and that I'm narrow-minded…. and that you hate Palestine or you agree with everything that Israel agrees with."

Chloe also feels the need to edit herself in certain spaces. She refrains from discussing Israel in her student government. She explains that "in that climate there's a lot of liberal people.

I too, would consider myself to be very Left-leaning but there's a lot of like, anti-Israel sentiment. And so, I don't ever talk about Israel in that group."

Subfinding 2.1b: Discussing Israel at School. Some girls also experienced difficulty navigating matters around Israel at school. They described incidents that left them feeling vulnerable and attacked. They felt that teachers and/or administrators were ill-prepared to offer them support or to teach the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a fair and nuanced way. They struggled with whether to speak up when a perceived injustice occurred and wished that they had support from teachers or friends in the process. Because their struggles were unique to them as Jewish students, they wondered if they were overreacting or being over-sensitive. At the same time, they felt that the experiences they encountered were damaging and traumatic.

Daniella shared an uncomfortable situation that occurred during a lesson on the Middle East. She and her classmates were tasked with dividing Palestine/Israel to model how UN members devised the Palestinian Partition plan and they were asked to vote on whose map was best. Daniella was the only Jewish student in her class. A Muslim classmate created a map and divided the land in a way that gave Palestine the coastline and left Israel with the desert. His map won with a landslide of votes. Daniella describes the class as "a hard class... just to see that happen," particularly since the teacher "kind of just accepted it, and moved onto how like, the UN divided the area" without processing the activity and its impact on students. Daniella struggled with whether or not to speak up to share her perspective. She explains:

> Sometimes it's a lot, because sometimes I don't know if I should say something. It's kind of like I'm the only person who would say something, because I'm Jewish and no one else is going to say something so it's like I have to do something about it, which is also something that I feel like it's kind of upsetting you know there's not a lot of allies.

Daniella explains that there are “not a lot of allies” at her school. While she is committed to defending her religion, she sometimes struggles with whether to or not to speak up. She is torn with wanting things to change, but also feeling that the responsibility is on her to change them, which can feel like a heavy burden to carry.

Rachel also had an incident where her teacher asked the students to pick a country they wanted to visit. After Rachel picked Israel, a student (who was not Muslim) picked Palestine “because they [thought] it [was] funny.” Rachel was the only one who noticed this microaggression. “Of course, my teacher doesn't do anything because, like, there's technically nothing wrong.” Rachel felt pinned into a corner. She wished that her teacher had realized that this was a problem and intervened, or that her friends had stepped in to support her. She explains, “I was in shock, I was like, why is this a thing?”

Laila also feels that students at her school would benefit from greater context around Antisemitism and Israel. In her mind, students at her school are taught a very “Pro-Palestine standpoint… like Israel's killing all the Palestinians... they're pushing the Palestinians out, this is what Israel is doing to the Palestinians.” Her classmates deflect all their frustrations onto her; “people keep getting mad at me after class about stuff like, ‘Oh, this is what your people did. I'm like, I'm doing nothing. I'm in America.’” Laila is the only Jewish student in her school, so she navigates these tensions on her own. She wishes that the teachers at her school would teach a more balanced approach to Israel.

Subfinding 2.1c: Jewish Invisibility. Girls also described feeling unsupported and unseen when it came to addressing issues around school policy and/or class content and its impact on Jewish students. Ella was disappointed by her [non-Jewish] friends’ failure to share her indignation that the World War II reading for History class barely referenced the Holocaust.

She feels that “they're not going to go out of their way to advocate and reach out to the teacher with me. It just shows how alone I am as a Jew at my school if that makes sense.”

Taylor also feels that “there is a kind of otherness that doesn't feel good through schools through non-Jewish friends and teachers.” She had to miss school for the Jewish high holidays and her teachers gave tests those days. “I didn't go to the second day of Rosh Hashanah prayers because I didn't want to make up the work. Like it [school] interfered with my Judaism.” She felt like her teacher “[didn’t] respect me as a Jew.”

Due to the invisible and unseen ways Antisemitism and tensions with Israel manifested in girls’ lives – and the ways it was minimized by adults in positions of authority – girls sometimes faced consequences when they responded to it on their own. Anna was reprimanded for responding to a classmate’s Antisemitic comments.

> Anna: Someone once told me that like the Holocaust was the Jews’ fault 'cause they controlled all the money and Germany was in a recession. And then I told him that was Nazi ideology and then I got in trouble for, you know, calling him a Nazi, which was a lovely experience, by the way.
>
> Cheryl: You got in trouble.
>
> Anna: Oh yeah. We were having an ongoing thing… that's not really important. But hey, I remember sitting in my counselor's office and she was going, ‘You know how serious that is. You know, like, how it affected people.’ I was just like, ‘Yes, I, of all people, do understand what that means.’ It was just this sort of indignation that I felt, I guess in that moment where I was just like, ‘Yes. Of course I understand what that means.’ Like, you definitely don't come to the extent that I do. I guess it's just things like that.

While Anna does not regret her actions, it felt unfair to be reprimanded for defending herself from Antisemitism. She was annoyed by her counselor’s failure to see the irony of the situation. Anna realizes that she has “be a little bit more cautious” with how she responds to Antisemitism and anti-Zionism from her peers. The boy in her class was looking to get a reaction from her. “He knew it would rile me up to say things.” When the class studied Israel, he also sent her harassing text messages.

In some cases, girls felt inspired to step into leadership to improve conditions for themselves and those around them. Daniella started a Jewish Student Union at her school to provide Jewish students with a safe space to share their Jewishness and celebrate their identity. She also shared testimony with her school committee about the Antisemitism she experienced at her school. Several girls, including Mia, Miriam, and Chloe, were involved in online efforts to combat Antisemitism. Others, including Alexandra, Sivan and Amira, were involved in organizations to advocate for Israel.

Subfinding 2.1d: Sign of Growth and Maturity. Other girls who were responding to Antisemitism attributed it to a sign of growth and maturity. Simone explains how her former classmates would “make Hitler jokes to me.” At the time, she did not know what was happening:

> You know, I kind of just like, fake laughed at it. I didn't really think about it ever again until you know, I learned more about Judaism and my ancestors, and how you know, how we had to go through what we go through. Sometimes I think about that moment and I'm like, wow, like, You know, I can't really blame myself, because I wasn't really educated on it. And I guess like you know, in middle school everyone wants to fit in.

Simone does not blame herself for who she was at the time. Rather, she feels that her newfound knowledge requires her to educate people about the positive attributes of Judaism. “Now, if someone were to say something I would not attack them, but like you know, stand up for myself and stand up for my religion, because my religion is beautiful." Simone relates her responsibility take a stand against Antisemitism to the sense of collectivism she feels with the Jewish People and their long-time vulnerability.

Subfinding 2.1e: Online Activism. Many of the girls spent several hours a day on social media, including Instagram, Snapchat, Tik Tok and other apps, as is typical for their generation. Several of the girls followed Jewish activist organizations that advocated against Antisemitism and others that represented various perspectives on Israel. This served as an important platform for them to gain and share knowledge. Girls often reposted content from these organizations and shared their own personal experiences with Antisemitism/anti-Zionism. For girls like Miriam, the Antisemitic content they viewed online inspired them to pay attention and "fight back." As Miriam traversed down a rabbit hole of hatred, she felt that she had no other choice but to respond:

> I would say I didn't dive that deep into Judaism until about the end of 2019. I started following these pages that were really just about Judaism and when I went a little bit more deeper into following those pages, I got suggested more pages and I realized that 'Oh my gosh, what are these pages posting? It's Antisemitism.' I need to do something about this, because my life depends on it.

Miriam began to "speak up" about Antisemitism and her opinions on Israel by sharing "informational posts" with her followers. She received "a few nasty DMs saying, 'Free Palestine, you pig,' pictures of Adolf Hitler', or birthday posts telling [her] why it was so important you're one year closer to death." She did not allow these threats to deter her. Rather, they motivated her to fight back.

Noa also received death threats after she posted a series of interviews she conducted with pro-Palestinian and pro-Israel teens. While the messages were upsetting, she did not feel that they posed a direct threat to her life:

> Noa: I posted a few videos a while back, about four or five. I have a total of half a million views.
>
> Cheryl: Oh, wow.
>
> Noa: But they were interviews. I interviewed a pro-Israel teen and then a pro-Palestinian teen. I was just interviewing them. I wasn't saying anything about my personal opinions. People were commenting with death threats. People were being like, 'How dare you, Zionist? Blah, blah, blah. And like, I've become desensitized towards it, because I know they're hiding behind their screen and if they saw me in person like they wouldn't be like, 'Death on your family, because you interviewed a pro-Israel person.
>
> Um, but it doesn't make it any easier, talking about the conflict on the Internet.

That said, girls wished that they could avoid this form of harassment in their lives. Maayan spoke about an issue that happened in their schools, where peers lashed out against Jewish students and students of color over social media. At Maayan's school, someone created an anonymous Instagram post claiming that "all of the Jewish kids in my class compare the Holocaust of slavery." She explains that:

> It just seems sort of unsubstantiated because there is racism in the Jewish community and there's a lot of Antisemitism in the Black Community I'm coming from. Like, they don't believe that Antisemitism is valid because all they know are White Jews and so they think that White Jews don't deserve anything for the Antisemitic experiences that they go

> through. So that sort of just intersected into this really weird debate like, online, like everyone at my school. So that was weird. It was just really harmful.

Several girls in the sample reported that they had received Antisemitic rhetoric and criticism against Israel from internet trolls, activists on the far-left, and/or their peers. These interactions affected them in different ways. Some girls became angry and fired back, while others felt the need to retreat from social media. Others expressed a desire for friends to support them by "liking" their posts on Antisemitism and Israel, since they typically did this causes that their friends cared about. Girls also indicated that they could see the pros and cons of social media as something that could help raise awareness as an education tool and to help with their social messaging, and by providing them with the ability to engage in dialogue and discussion with people they might not otherwise have access to.

At the same time, some girls were critical of its ability to truly deliver real, authentic social justice. Leora explains, "I just repost a lot of stuff to my story which sort of everyone is doing nowadays." At the same time, she explains that she feels more comfortable speaking up in person rather than online since people know "who I am…. They know what I stand for. It's definitely easier for me to talk and speak up."

Alaina shares:

> I've always felt like after I post something, like what good is it really doing? Like, I'm not donating anything, or like, even if I do donate, like how much did I really like change anything? And then I feel like If I'm silent about it, it's worse than almost like, then, like just exposing myself and exposing my vulnerabilities and sort of like calling people out.

Alaina raises a lot of questions. She wonders whether she should use social media to speak about her Jewish identity or remain silent out of fear of attracting hatred from others. She is also concerned about the performative aspect of online activism, and whether it is a useful platform to bring about social change.

Subfinding 2.1f: Girls Who Feel Excluded from Online Spaces. Jordana wishes that people would show the same respect to Antisemitism as they do for other minority groups on Instagram:

> There's such a huge focus on other minority groups and issues that are happening in the U.S., and while that is 100% important, I'm like, why can't we just have awareness for all of them? Like, if you're posting for one. Like, it takes two seconds to also like, post something and educate others on something else.

Some girls received disturbing content in response to their posts. Maayan deleted Instagram after an encounter with “Nazis coming onto my page.” She explains, “like, that really messed me up for a while.” As a Jewish person of color, she thinks that it is in her best interest to avoid discussing Antisemitism and racism to preserve her mental health. However, because of her identities, people look to her as the expert on these issues and think that she wants to talk about them:

> I actually don't always feel like talking about racism. It's like my mental health and it makes me really sad. I don't need to because it's not healthy. I don't like engaging with Antisemites either. I don't fight with them, I don't talk to them, I just ignore them. But then people are suddenly just all around me just like, talking about like, the same performative racism stuff and I'm like, ‘Okay, this isn't doing anything and you're putting me through this again. Like, I need to preserve like, my own mental health because I already have to deal with like you know, college and an insane amount of homework and you know, whatever's going on, like socially but then like, I don't want hate from random

> strangers, and maybe when I'm older I'll decide to like, mentally take that on because I see a lot of people have like, made the conscious decision to like, be publicly Jewish and like, actually like talk to people, but maybe I'll be ready for that someday but like I'm not ready for that right now.

Maayan feels overwhelmed by the hatred around her, particularly when she is also dealing with the pressure of being a "typical" teenager. She wishes that people would understand that she is still developing, she is not yet an adult, and she also needs protection from a difficult and unpredictable world.

Subfinding 2.1g: Black Lives Matter. Another issue girls raised was how they were making sense of the purported Antisemitism within the Black Lives Matter movement and its negative stance toward Israel.[97][98] This brought up different challenges for girls based on a host of factors, including their position on Israel, their race, their understanding of race, and stories they heard from their families. Girls were at different places with how they approached the narrative and where they located themselves within it. Some girls were conflicted about where their allegiances stood.

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[97] Some factions of the Black Lives Matter movement have been accused of adopting Boycott Divest Sanctions against Israel, and have referred to Israel as an apartheid state.

[98] The Jewish Council for Public Affairs notes that, "One subset of the [Black Lives Matter] movement, the Movement for Black Lives, opposes US military aid toward Israel" (Jewish Council on Public Affairs, 2015). This detail has pitted members of the Jewish community and People of Color against each other and left Jews of (both White and Jews of Color) torn between alliances. It is important to note that there are many nuances to this discourse, and many different narratives around it, which have resulted in broken lines of communication between People of Color and Jews – who have a long history of participating in activism and community together. Moreover, Black Lives Matter can mean different things to different people – they can identify with the "movement," or with the more general concept of dismantling racism – as can being Jewish and identifying with Israel.

Mia identifies with Black Lives Matter and has been a long-time activist with the movement. However, she encountered a difficult crossroads a few years ago at a BLM rally when people started chanting anti-Israel cheers. This was a disorienting experience for her and she did not know how to respond:

> I went to a Black Lives Matter protest in like 10th grade, and they said, 'From the River to the Sea,' or something like that and I was like, 'What do I do?' Like, I was so uncomfortable. I was like, 'Do I have to say it too?' I was like, 'This is my identity. I can't... that calls for the destruction of Israel. Like, you know?' And I was like, 'I don't know what to do.' And I kinda froze. It's like, I don't want to face all these people. So that was a time I felt really uncomfortable and like, very unwelcome.

Mia was taken aback by the situation. She attended the rally as an ally and felt attacked because of her allegiance to Israel. She wants to be both for BLM and for Israel. However, she struggles to create visibility around Antisemitism, both inside and outside of the movement. For example, during the George Floyd protests,[99] Mia shared a post about an Antisemitic incident that was perpetrated by a Black football player. She received tremendous backlash from (White) friends and acquaintances, who informed her, "Hey, like this is not the time." Mia is tired of people telling her, “You shouldn't be bringing this up,” particularly when she “feels like we can bring attention to one issue without minimizing another.” However, it is frustrating for her to feel constantly shut down by people.

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[99] George Floyd, a Black man, was murdered by Derek Chauvin, a White police officer, who kneeled on his neck for over nine minutes in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020 for allegedly using a counterfeit $20. Chauvin refused to release his grasp from Floyd, despite the fact that he was showing obvious signs of distress. The following day - a cellphone video of his murder was released - and launched a tirade of nationwide protests to denounce police brutality and murders of Black men at the hands of police.

Taylor is trying to figure out where her allegiances lie. She cares about Antisemitism, Israel, and Black Lives Matter. As the older sister of someone who is Black, she feels that it is her responsibility to protect her younger sister from all the racism, Antisemitism and anti-Zionism in the world.

> I've heard from some of my Jewish friends that AOC and some of her Senate friends are Antisemitic. But I don't know how true that information is, or if it was just found on Instagram and they were like, ‘Yeah that's true.’ But I do know that there is some Antisemitism in the government and Black Lives Matter. It's everywhere. But I mean, for me, especially when I'm not directly impacted, I have to figure out which one needs me more, and which one do I need to currently support more for the better of people that need it – and that's very big. But for me, it's like, my sister's Black. She has micro and not so microaggressions and she's in this Jewish community that's like not really supporting the cause, and it has this anti-Zionist movement. Yeah, so I mean I really want her to know that, like we at least as a family, if not as a community, support her and I don't need to be directly associated with Black Lives Matter.

Taylor cares about Black lives, but she does not want to stand with a movement that is Antisemitic.

Ariella takes a different approach to addressing the purported Antisemitism within BLM. While she finds it problematic, she attributes it to a function of White supremacy. She feels that Jewish people have a tendency to “use Antisemitism as a distraction from the real issues of racism, LGBTQ+ equality, and Black Lives Matter.” She thinks it is important to fight Antisemitism and racism together since they are “very intertwined.” She “think[s] that by fighting like, White nationalism, by fighting it through the lens of like all the -isms out there, like it'll go away, but that's kind of how I see it.”

While the majority of girls who spoke about the purported Antisemitism within BLM expressed a commitment to upending racism, Amira was an exception. She expressed misgivings about the relationship between [White] Jews and People of Color. She feels that “Jews are very quick to help, and this dates back to the Civil Rights movement,” a message she internalized from members of her family:

> My grandma was like, “Did you know Jews there marching alongside with them [Black people]? And what happened in return?” Not that we were asking for anything, but when there was an Antisemitic movement going on…. when things like the Holocaust were happening, were they there? I think at the end of day, we only have ourselves to rely on and only ourselves to really help us.

Amira’s sentiments (and her grandmother’s) are far from unique. Some Jews see themselves as victimized and alone, thus necessitating a focus on Jewish self-sufficiency and communal care, a worldview that is grounded in profound fear and intergenerational trauma. Amira did not consider the unequal power relationship between Black people and White Jewish people in her historical narrative.

Subfinding 2.2: Complicated Relationships with Israel: Learning New Information about Israel

Many girls were also struggling to integrate newfound knowledge that conflicted with what they had been told by parents and educators in religious schools, camps, synagogues, and other Jewish institutions about Israel. A general critique was that they felt that the education that they received was incomplete, since it focused on Jews' connection to the land and its religious and cultural history. It failed to provide them with a nuanced understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which reflects larger trends in Jewish American education (Breger, 2017).

> Something that's really difficult for me to learn about is that other Jews that were complicit in oppression [against Palestinians]. That's really difficult for me to hear about. Also, like hearing about politics in Israel has been really difficult to hear. Like, I had no idea about any of that because you know, like in synagogue, you learn about you know, Haifa and Tel Aviv, and the Western Wall, and like all these like really beautiful things. Now I'm learning by myself. It's such a difficult conversation and conflict to talk about because people are so opinionated. And to be like, wait, hold on, 'I didn't know that before.' That's something I've made a point of like being better at.

Mia is describing the process she went through when she realized that Israel had a more complex history than what she had been taught at her synagogue religious school. As she acquires this new information, she wishes she had access to people with whom to engage in open and trusting conversations. However, whenever she brings it up, she feels that immediately shot down by her non-Jewish peers, who attack her on Israel's right to exist. She has been reading the works of different progressive Zionist scholars and following a variety of influencers on Instagram to acquire new sources of information.

A recent school assignment on Israeli agriculture prompted Claudia to take a critical look at Israeli politics and history. She is wrestling with new knowledge that "Jews, trying to create their own sense of community, displaced such a huge group of people," something she did not learn about in Hebrew school. She feels that "my understanding of Israel was so wrong and that's like a big deal." She has continued to educate herself by engaging in open dialogue with Muslim friends about the displacement of the Palestinian people. Claudia has also organized dialogues between the multicultural association and the Muslim students' association at her school. This helped her to expand her understanding about the conflict "because I kind of went into it with this kind of weird idea of like oh it's just you know everyone hates the Jews like that's what it's all about. It's far more complicated."

In the future, she "want[s] to have more opportunities actually like as a Jewish person to choose the relationship I want between Palestine and Israel."

Girls expressed multiple opinions when it came to discussing Israel.[100] Many girls described feeling a connection to Israel, and a desire for peace with Palestinians. Similar to Mia, other girls also shared that they were only just learning about Israel's complicated relationship with Palestinians. They were frustrated with what they perceived as a one-sided view of Israeli history that they received from Jewish institutions, such as day schools, camps and religious schools that ignored Israel's ongoing conflict with Palestinians, which they were forced to contend with on their own. Most of the information they received came from Instagram and other social media sources.

Subfinding 2.2a: Girls Overwhelmingly Want Peace with Palestinians. Samantha feels caught in the middle. "It's definitely hard to see that people don't want Israel to be there. And it's definitely hard seeing people not believe that Palestine should be there. I don't really know. It's very complicated." Rachel agrees. "I think it's incredibly complex. Like, even as someone who's Jewish. I think that deserves the right to exist and Palestine has the right to exist, I think it's possible to be pro-Israel and Palestine."

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[100] Two of the interview questions (Interview #2, questions 12 and 13), focused on Israel, which speaks to their centrality in the findings.

Sivan is in charge of the Israel club at her school. She strives to represent an objective viewpoint when discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in her community. She recently became entrenched in a battle with the head of her school over what she perceived as their one-sided approach to the conflict. She "ended up addressing the administration trying to change that and faced a lot of flak and pushback." She explains, "I'm very clear and intentional about seeing validity around the many narratives that surround the conflict." While she was glad to have achieved a successful outcome, it was painful and exhausting. She is thinking about taking a step back from her Israel activism when she enters college since "it's exhausting to have the conversation with people on both sides who are really like, misinformed and not trying to rectify that and like insulating themselves in narratives that give them comfort." Sivan feels that people are more interested in saying what they have to say rather than listening to one another.

Subfinding 2.2b: Girls Do Not Want to be Associated with the Israeli Government. They Want a Chance to Explain Themselves. Some girls chose to separate their relationship with Israel from its government. They felt it was unfair that they were blamed for its actions. Ariella feels that "my relationship with Israel is complicated. I think the government is horrible. But I still love Israel, I still love going to Israel and I love having a relationship with it."

Maayan is frustrated by people's tendency to associate the actions of the Israeli government with all Jews:

> I think people conflate Zionism with like, the actual like, actions of the Israeli government. Like, I have nothing to do with that. I've never met him [Benjamin Netanyahu]...I can't control the guy. I can't do anything about that.

She rationalizes that “the actual thought of believing that Jewish people should have their own space and “support[ing] the Israeli government are two completely different things.” Furthermore, she does not see other countries and/or people from other religions being treated this way. She doesn’t see “anyone like, boycotting America for things that they have done. Plenty of people criticize the US and still live in the US.” Anna agrees with Maayan. She thinks that it is important for people who criticize Israel to look at their own politics. While she is concerned about Palestinians’ wellbeing and holds Israel accountable for mistreating them, she also sees Israel as an important refuge for Jews, particularly in light of the Holocaust. She describes a frustrating conversation she had when she tried to explain her perspective to her classmates. However, they shut her down and refused to let her speak:

> I was trying to explain how you know, just kind of from my side of it growing up and just hearing a lot about Israel and just how that's informed me, but like, whatever I said was just like, ‘You're crazy! Israel is terrible! They're killing all the Palestinians. Why do you support them at all? You're a terrible person!’ And it was just this very difficult thing to be there, 'cause I very much don't want Palestinians to die. I think it is absolutely terrible, especially how the government's handling basically everything with the vaccinations. Um, but you know, one of the great things that I heard was, ‘How come the Jews just decided to go to Israel?’ And I was like, ‘You know the Holocaust? You know the genocide? Remember that one? That may have played a part in it.’ Well, there are just a lot of comments like that, or like, ‘What claim did the Jewish people ever have to that piece of land? Why did they just get to march in there and do it,’ which I think is the height of irony for anyone who lives in America. Like, I'm not saying that it's OK, but like, you can't just keep living here and being totally fine with it.

Anna’s classmates were more interested in attacking her than listening to what she had to say.

Mia had a similar situation with peers with whom she was engaged in a political fellowship program. The conversation, which took place over text, quickly devolved into an attack against Israel. She tried to keep the discussion focused on politics, but her peers were more interested in finding ways to delegitimize Israel’s existence:

> It was attacked. Like the entire country was attacked, like the culture of it. Like things they were saying, like the food was stolen, like how it was created, like all these things, and I was like guys, ‘Can we just you know, agree to like, talk about Israeli politics, but not talk about like, the legitimacy of a state if that makes sense.’ Like, I'm so good to talk about politics. But they were saying like, ‘Okay, we need to relocate everybody that's Israeli so that the Palestinian people can have their country back,’ and I was like, ‘that makes no sense. Like, where are the Jews going to go?’ And I was trying to say like, ‘You have no fundamental understanding of Antisemitism because if you did then you'd understand there is nowhere else to go. Like, we literally have nowhere else.’ So, you know that was the kind of thing they were saying.

Mia credits Israel with saving her family’s life after they were forcibly removed from Egypt. While she realizes that many aspects of the country are flawed, she feels that “my family has been safe there for a very long time and they haven't been safe in other places.”

Samantha feels “disgusted” by the Israeli government, but her criticism is not specific to Israel. “I believe in criticizing the government, I actually…I just don't like the government but that's a whole ‘nother story. I feel that governments almost everywhere else are disgusting.” She is bothered by the way that the American news conflates the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians to one that involves all Jews. “They always say Jews and Palestine, and we have nothing to do with it." All the Jewish people that Samantha knows believe in a two-state solution. However, she feels that her narrative is missing from the mainstream media.

Shira stood apart from the other girls. Whereas they were trying to develop a personal relationship with Israel that was separate from its government, Shira describes herself as an ardent Israeli activist who is committed to defending the country. She thinks that it is important to "do everything in your power to make sure that Israel has a voice and it's not just like Palestinian media that's being heard." The majority of her activist work involves engaging with White non-Jewish people and dismantling their ideas about what is really happening in Israel. Some of Shira's friends express a more sympathetic view of Palestinians than she does. Her activism can sometimes pose challenges with her friends, so she tries to show care with what she says:

> When I talk about Israel, I'm always careful that I know what I'm talking about. But I feel like if it's my best friend, and this is someone that I am going to start a fight with, who I care about a lot, and this is like a topic that I'm so passionate about and she is maybe not so passionate, it's just difficult because I'm not trying to lose her friendship. But also this is who I am. And it's not that she doesn't know that, because everybody knows that. She knows that this is a huge part of who I am and what I do. She definitely knows important things – she just thinks the way that media has portrayed Palestinian people is more like victims, so feels like she's advocating for the smaller voice. And I understand that she feels that's what she's doing. But this isn't something that she does all the time. Like, I will start that conversation, because I know that she's not pro-Israel, and so I love hearing from people who are not as pro-Israel as I am, so I can learn more about what they think, and then develop an argument against that for future purposes. But she's not like going

> around and telling people like, 'Oh Israel sucks...like Israel is doing this, or the Palestinian people are being harmed...that's not what she does. It's just that she has her own private views and that's what that is.

Shira and her friend have found ways to respect each other's point of view by carefully listening to each other and putting the friendship first. Shira also enjoys listening to her friend's opposing viewpoints since they help her to better refute her arguments, a somewhat mercenary perspective.

This alludes to the unique challenges that Jewish girls may face when discussing Israel and their complex relationship with it. As girls' understanding of Israel grows and evolves, many remain steadfast in their Zionist beliefs. As Amira puts it, "it's the only home we have that's truly safe." Olivia agrees. While she does not know much about Israel, she became offended when a teacher referred to it as Palestine. She feels that "it's Jewish land. Like, that's like the one thing that's like, really holy to Jews." Other girls are developing an understanding of Israel's complicated relationship with Palestinians and figuring out where they stand in the conflict and what they want their relationship with Israel to look like. They expressed the desire for validation from their non-Jewish peers.

Finding 3: Girls Are Thinking about What It Means to Navigate the World as an Identified Jew

As part of girls' identity construction, they were also thinking about when and where to show their Jewishness, and also, how to present themselves to the world as Jews. Part of this included how they *chose* to reveal signs and symbols of their Jewishness, such as Stars of David and wearing religious wear such as *kippot*, which marked them as Jewish. When making these decisions, girls carefully thought about the messages they received from friends, family, and social media about what it meant to navigate the world as an identified Jew. The girls' decisions varied according to context and proved to be an evolving process. The other concept girls were evaluating was what it meant to *look* Jewish and to be *considered* Jewish by others. The girls' understandings of these concepts were shaped by dominant norms around them, which they were examining critically for themselves. They were thinking about where they fell in relation to these norms and how they applied to their own understanding of Jewish identity.

Subfinding 3.1: Girls Are Negotiating When and Where They Can Show Their Jewish Identities

As girls were developing their own independent identities and making decisions for themselves, they debated whether they should remove signs and symbols that marked them as identifiably Jewish. Many girls related to their Jewishness by wearing jewelry with a *Magen David* (Star of David), a *chai* (two Hebrew letters that symbolize life), a *hamsa,* a *kippah,* or by wearing clothing that had Hebrew or a Jewish logo on it (such as the name of their camp or youth group). Many girls had internalized messages from family members who urged them to remove these items or hide them in public. This meant different things to girls based on circles they traveled in, the communities where they lived, their family's experience with Jewishness/Antisemitism, and/or their particular stage in life. For example, girls who were applying to college wondered if they should list their Jewish/Israel activities on their applications in the event that this information counted against them. Girls responded to these messages in different ways: through acts of defiance, and with feelings of confusion, fear and uncertainty:

> Normally I would like, wear Star of David or something. Um, I think, just like in my own experience, I think it's weird because, obviously, like, you know, my dad like reminds us like, the climate here isn't always like the climate everywhere, and like, the fact that we're

> so openly Jewish is something that I think is weird to think about. Like what that means for me and other interactions because, like, my friends know I'm Jewish. Like, I think there's definitely been some times where I'm like, ‘What would I do if I were in a situation where I wasn't sure if people were okay with Jewish people, would I hold back the information? Um, because I really haven't been anywhere where I really felt that way. I think it’s weird to think about that. I'm like, ‘What would I do?’

Claudia describes a struggle experienced by other girls regarding whether it was safe to reveal signs or symbols of their Jewish identity. While this seems like an inconsequential act to her, her father sometimes reminds her that her freedom to express this identity is conditional. Claudia has not personally experienced Antisemitism, but she wonders how she would respond if this were the case. Would she stand up for her Jewish identity, or would she keep this information to herself?

Subfinding 3.1a: Visibility and Defiance. Simone, who experienced Antisemitism in the past, wears a *Magen David* necklace and several rings with *hamsas* on them to represent her Jewish identity. She wears her jewelry all the time. “I go into the pool with it. Any activity I do with it. I sleep with it, whatever.” However, she sometimes receives pushback from her mother, who fears for her safety. “My mom…you know my mom is mostly like, ‘Hide your star,’ and I would be like, ‘Mom, no, like I’m not gonna hide my star no, you know.’” Simone feels that “if someone did have something to say about my religion, I would definitely stand up for it, you know, because at the end of the day, like, I love being Jewish and it's really who I am.” Simone feels “lucky enough to be in a Jewish populated community. Like one in every three people here is Jewish and so I feel like that's really helped me embrace it [her Jewishness] because I know

I'm around other Jewish people.” Perhaps if Simone lived in a place with fewer Jewish people – as she did in the past – she would feel less comfortable showcasing her Jewish identity.

Like Simone, Alaina also wants to display her Jewishness. She received a special *Magen David* necklace for her bat mitzvah and she was excited to wear it. However, her mother, who experienced Antisemitism in both America and Ukraine, was reluctant for her to wear it:

> My mom said, ‘Wear it under your shirt because you're going to get attacked.’ And I was like, ‘I know I should probably care about like, getting hurt and stuff but I'm not going to do that, I'm just going to wear it and, like, what happens will happen. I'm not going to hide who I am,’ and that kind of like, drives me to do a lot of the things that I'm passionate about.

Alaina understands the risks involved in wearing a symbol of her Judaism. She wants to show the world that she is Jewish regardless – or perhaps – in spite of them.

Mia’s parents also want her to hide signs of her Jewishness when she leaves the house. She feels that her parents are overprotective:

> They are very adamant about Jewish things. Like, my dad is very paranoid about Antisemitism. Like, he spray painted our mezuzah White to match our doors so nobody can see it. Like I get screamed at literally every time I try to wear a Star of David outside of the house. I have to tuck it in.

While she understands her parents’ concerns, she hates that she has to hold back a fundamental aspect of herself. “It's like, really horrible to think that we'd have to hide a piece of ourselves.” Like, we have to think about like, ‘Why is the world like that?’” Mia would rather show her Jewishness and try to engage in strategies to promote tolerance among all people. She refuses to feel ashamed of her Jewish identity.

Olivia, who also lives in a small Jewish community, explains that “for the longest time I wasn't confident in who I was or in my identity, but the second I did become confident in myself, I didn't care what other people thought.”

Subfinding 3.1b: Identity Concealment. As the only Jewish student at her school, Miriam deliberately chooses when and with whom to share her Jewish identity. She is afraid that her peers will see her as a “rich greedy Jew,” an internalized stereotype that she could have learned from her peers, the media, or elsewhere in society. Miriam wears a Magen David necklace in the shape of a flower. This enables her to express her Jewish identity while also protecting herself from Antisemitism. She explains, “I've seen an attack here on a Jewish person. Well, they put out fliers saying, ‘Kill Jews’ and stuff and there's not a big Jewish community at all, so it's just difficult to be outwardly Jewish without feeling unsafe.” Miriam feels that she must conceal her Jewish identity to stay safe in her community and to navigate the different communities to which she belongs.

While some girls felt comfortable expressing their Jewish identities in familiar environments, they were hesitant to reveal this identity in new and unfamiliar places due to concerns about personal safety and Antisemitism. This suggests that they perceive Jewishness as a context-dependent identity, where they must constantly evaluate whether or not to share this aspect of themselves and to “pass”.

Chloe feels that she can safely identify as Jewish when she is at school and when she is with her friends. For example, she wears a Star of David, and she talks openly about being Jewish. However, her behavior changes when she is outside her known community:

> As soon as I step out of like, this space or even like going somewhere else in my state, it does feel difficult. And I also have a hard time being open about being religiously Jewish

> on the Internet, like on Instagram. Like, I'm very comfortable identifying maybe with like, the [Jewish] community, but in terms of talking about like, my own beliefs, that's something I feel like I have to hold back a lot of the time, and I think it's just a stigma about like, religious people in general, like yeah. But definitely like, leaving my city. Sometimes I get like, really uncomfortable like, in airports if I'm like, wearing a Star of David necklace. Like I put it in my shirt because I'm like I don't even know what would happen, but I don't want to know.

Chloe feels the need to be vigilant about potential Antisemitism when she is in an unfamiliar place. She is also afraid to talk about religion on social media, where a great deal of girls' – and teens' – identity development takes place (Mazzarella, 2005). It is unclear whether she is afraid to talk about her religious beliefs because her peers will think that she is proselytizing or if she thinks that they are uninterested. She could also be referring to the harassment experienced by "religious" Jews who wear *kippot, tallitot,* etc., and the need to protect herself from being identified that way. Regardless, she feels the need to edit herself as a means of self-preservation.

Alexandra is relieved that her last name does not belie her Jewishness. She explains, "I'm very lucky, because my last name is completely goyish. If not, like people would know right away I'm Jewish." Her family often travels to places that are inhospitable to Jews. When they do, they go out of their way to hide their Jewishness. For example, her family went to Europe during the Christmas holiday. Her mother gave her and her sister Christmas gifts so they could blend in with other [non-Jewish] people at the hotel:

> We travel a lot, and when I'm abroad, I don't ever want people to know that I'm Jewish. I went to Turkey and we did not tell anyone I was Jewish. When we went to England – we went there for the holidays, we were staying at this hotel. My mom...she's so sweet. She

> had like, our Christmas presents set aside for us so that if a kid asked me like, at the hotel what I got for Christmas, I could tell them what I got for Christmas.

It is unclear whether Alexandra would have otherwise received Christmas presents, or if her mother gave them to her in an effort to help her hide her Jewishness. Alexandra was relieved by her mother's plan. "I don't know. In retrospect, I would have been a really, really bad liar. So yeah, my mom was very adamant about that." Alexandra's family went out of their way to show that they were part of the dominant Christian culture.

Subfinding 3.1c: Jewishness and Identity Confusion. Jordana is facing a different type of struggle. She is a graduating senior who recently applied to college. Much of Jordana's time has been spent participating in Jewish and Israeli-oriented activities. She was concerned as to whether she should share this information since it could affect her chances for acceptance:

> I do actually always hesitate with whether or not I should check off 'Jewish' or whether I should put 'other' or leave it blank, or whether I should like, talk about Judaism in my college applications. Like, it was a very real thing for me. Like, what if the person reading my application is Antisemitic, or anti-Israel or this or that, and takes it the wrong way, and that's why I don't get into college?

Jordana fears that her Jewish identification and her connection to Israel will count against her. She wonders if she should keep her Jewish identity a secret to increase her chances of getting into college.

Alaina is also concerned that her options for higher education could be limited because of her Jewishness and her Palestinian and Israeli activism. It is unclear why she thinks that her Palestinian activism would pose a problem, given her concern about anti-Zionism, but she could be associating this with her advocacy for Israel:

> I feel like I've looked up that some colleges are like actively like anti-Israel and anti-Jewish and so I feel like, if I were to talk about my activism, I would never be able to say that I was like Jewish or like I work with Israel and Palestine.

The girls worry that their Jewish identity and support for Israel could preclude them from getting into certain universities, and they are scared. They wonder if it is in their best interest to withhold their Jewish identity and keep their Israeli-related activism a secret.

Phoebe's experience is somewhat different than the other girls'. They are not thinking about hiding their Jewishness per se. Rather, they are making sense of how people respond to signs of their Jewishness. Since embarking on their Jewish journey, Phoebe has taken to wearing a *kippah*, a Jewish skullcap, daily. They have had several encounters where people have stopped them and/or asked probing questions. Phoebe had a recent incident that caught them off guard, when a person touched them without permission:

> Phoebe: I was just like out and about and I was by myself and this older woman, she like, put her hand on me and was like, 'Shabbat Shalom.' And it was really weird, and I don't think she was Jewish. Well, I guess there's no way of knowing, but that was like, very strange, especially like physical touch from strangers right now [because of COVID-19] ...
>
> Cheryl: So, how did you feel about this situation?
>
> Phoebe: Um, I think like, on the one hand, it's like, weird being acknowledged as like a Jewish person in public, but it's also that's part of the reason why I wanted to wear a *kippah*, I could like be visibly Jewish so yeah, sort of a weird thing to grapple with, mm hm.

Phoebe was surprised that a person would be bold enough to touch them, particularly during the pandemic. While the person's gesture was likely well-intentioned, Phoebe was taken aback by the interaction.

This reveals the multiple tensions that the girls were contending with as they thought about presenting signs and symbols of their Jewishness to the world. Some girls felt proud of sharing their identity, while others were wrestling with the potential consequences that could come with it. All of the girls were aware that revealing their Jewish identity could make them vulnerable to attack and/or judgment from others, and they were evaluating the consequences of this decision. This indicates the impact of girls' experiences on their development. This weighed heavily on some girls' minds.

Subfinding 3.1d: Looking Jewish and "Acting Jewish". Girls also shared their opinions on whether there was a "typical" Jewish look and way of being Jewish that was shaped by dominant norms and stereotypes. They discussed how it affected their visibility as Jews and the way that people responded to them, both inside Jewish communities and outside of them. They noted that looking the part could serve as a positive identifier for building community with other Jews. They also expressed concerns that this was a reductive way of thinking since it "othered" those who fell outside of these norms, in terms of ways of living, experiencing Judaism, and presenting oneself to the world. This could exclude Jews from feeling included in communities and experiences and limit their ways of being in the world. Moreover, it made Jews vulnerable to stereotyping from White supremacists and neo-Nazis. Girls who were White and non-White were aware of these norms and stereotypes, and their proximity to them. Claudia also mentioned how her grandmother also loves to talk about "successful Jewish people." Alexandra thinks that:

> Stereotypes are a good thing. Like there are a lot of Jewish billionaires. I think there are a lot of Jewish Nobel laureates. Like we're just pretty awesome. Like my friends and I have conversations. Like Jews kind of do control the banks and the media. Like, we're not Jewish supremacists by any means, but I mean, I think that, like there are things to be proud of.

These ideologies – which girls drew from larger assumptions around them (media, things that people said, that they intuited from others), related to how Jewish girls saw themselves and saw other Jews in the context of the "larger" Jewish experience.

Jordana feels lucky that no one ever questions her Jewish identity. "I feel very privileged that even if people don't automatically think that I'm Jewish when I tell them, like, nobody questions that. Like, I'm very like, legitimate in the fact that I'm Jewish." Jordana knows that this is not the case for all Jews.

Samantha, who was recently told she looked like a Jew, is trying to figure out what this means. She wonders whether this is a good thing, or whether it takes away her individuality:

> So, this is another thing, I know I am White, it is very obvious I'm White. I'm very pale. But people can tell I'm Jewish by the way I look. I don't know what that means, but I get told I look Jewish all the time. A lot of my other friends… if they have curly hair, people will like, 'You have a big nose, are you Jewish?' What the hell is that? But when you go around saying, 'Oh, you look Jewish,' is that supposed to be a good thing? I don't know what that means. I want to look like myself. I don't want to look like a big group of people who are associated by religion. I didn't even realize that was a thing. Like, I've never been told I looked like a Jew until like a year ago.

Claudia also had a situation where someone assumed she was Jewish. **“**Well, my friend is talking to me and she's like, ‘Well Jews, they have like, big curly hair and big eyebrows’ and she was like, ‘Oh, maybe Claudia's Jewish.’” She did not know what to make of this, as she had never heard a comment like this before. Alexandra, on the other hand, acknowledges that “everyone can tell I’m a Jew. I have huge curly hair. You can't really see it right now, but like when it's dry it's like this it's an afro. It's straight up an afro.”

Taylor understands what it means to “look like an Ashkenazi Jew.” “I mean I have curly hair, and I have a like, kind of bump on my nose, so I do look Ashkenazi a bit, but like that's the only identifying marker.” Ariella, on the other hand, does not feel as though she “looks” Jewish. She thinks that “looking Jewish” is something that is identified through visible markers rather than genetic traits; “I don't feel like I look Jewish. I don't look Orthodox; I'm not Orthodox.” To Ariella, a person’s Jewishness is reflected through ritual wear, such as a *kippah,* or a *tallis*. Ariella has also grown up in largely Jewish contexts, so her frame of reference could differ from other girls’.

Anna, on the other hand, is often mistaken for other Jewish students by her teacher, which minimizes her and other Jewish students’ individuality. She explains how she will “get confused a lot with other Jews, like all the time, or like someone would think we were related. It would happen in my math class; like me and one of the other Jewish kids would always raise their hand, and we would always get confused.” This frustrates Anna, since she and other Jewish other students look different from one another.

Subfinding 3.1e: Not Counting. Three girls/participants who came from interfaith families had experiences where people questioned their “Jewishness” or their family’s Jewishness. Maayan’s father converted to Judaism before she was born. She describes him as "very devoted to Judaism. Whenever someone criticizes converts it hits home because he's so devoted to my life and to Judaism." Phoebe also recalls that their peers would tell them, "Oh, you didn't have a like a bar mitzvah that means you like, you're not Jewish."

Daniella faced similar struggles at her former day school. Her mother is not Jewish, and her peers would tell her that she wasn't a "real" Jew, since Judaism is passed through the maternal bloodline. This was hurtful for Daniella, since she loves being Jewish, and her mother supports her Jewish upbringing:

> I went to my private Jewish school and people would say like, 'Oh, if your mom's not Jewish, then you're not Jewish,' and that would like, hurt my feelings. I would be like ten years old or younger and I would almost start crying 'cause like, I so heavily identified with all the Jewish things that I was learning. And then it would just kind of like affect me 'cause they would even call me like a muggle, like referencing Harry Potter. My mom is like, super supportive, you know. Like, she totally influences me and like, pushes me to do all the Jewish activities that I want to do.

Subfinding 3.1f: Not Looking Jewish. As discussed in the next finding, many Jewish girls of color acknowledged that people are generally surprised when they share their Jewish identity. Dafna shares that "everyone's reaction is, 'You're Jewish? You don't look Jewish.' Um, and it's really funny because my dad is the most stereotypical Ashkenazi old Jewish guy from Brooklyn." She shares an experience where her peers were incredulous when they found out that she and her father were related:

> I once had this experience where I was on a school trip to New York. We were in line for a Broadway show. My dad was going to go see the Broadway show too, because was also in New York. And he came in line to say hi to me. Okay, obviously, you know that

> feeling when you're a teenager with your friends….So he left and went to the back of the line. And all the kids in my class turned to me and wanted to know who that guy was. I was like, ‘That's my dad.’

People have told Maayan’s that her mother is too pretty to be Jewish. “My mom has received backhanded compliments from other Jews, like “You're too pretty to be Jewish,” or like, “You're so pretty for a Jew,” which is really insulting and I hate that and it's not nice.

Some participants, like Phoebe, were quick to note how they were not limited by stereotypes, but rather, how they were transcending them through their bodily presentation. Phoebe notes how their Whiteness keeps them safe. They are also aware that by potentially “marking” themselves as gender non-conforming and by wearing a kippa, they are “choosing” an identity, choices that are not available to people:

> As a White and able-bodied person in America, my body grants me privilege in safety. I am not perceived through racist lenses and don’t really present myself in any specific way as a reaction to that accordingly. As for my other identities, given my presentation (short hair, androgynous dress, etc.), I am sure that I am perceived as queer. When I wear a *kippah*, as I have been doing daily for the past few months, I am perceived not only as Jewish, but also as gender nonconforming.

Finding 4: Jewish Girls Are Making Sense of Their Intersectional Identities and Understanding Their Unique Experiences

Many girls in the study were working to understand their multifaceted identities. They were trying to make sense of their racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, and socioeconomic identities, and the ways that they interacted with one another. Their self-concept was informed through their interactions with various social institutions, such as school, healthcare, religion, government, political organizations, family, and the way that people perceived them. In many cases, the issues they cared about were informed by and shaped by their own unique identities.

Subfinding 4.1: “Otherness” of Jewish Girls of Color

All ten Jewish girls of color in the sample described experiences where they were made to feel less than by White Jews because of their race and/or ethnicity. This happened in multiple and overlapping forms. Girls shared moments where they felt tokenized or invisible. They felt that people were fascinated by them or expected them to speak on behalf of all Jews of Color. This made them feel like second-class citizens in places where they were meant to feel a sense of belonging. These experiences made girls feel sad, angry, frustrated, and confused. They expressed an overwhelming desire to feel counted as Jews.

Subfinding 4.1a: Ongoing Microaggressions. In Olivia’s experience, it can be exhausting to be a Jew of Color. When she was younger, people would try to touch her hair without her permission:

> Everyone would touch my hair all the time and ask my mom where she got me. It honestly made me feel like a walking unicorn. I mean, before people ask me my name, they ask me, ‘Oh, what are you?’ Once they figure out who I am and they're like, ‘Wow, I've never met someone who's White Black and Jewish.’ And I mean, I wrote a whole essay about this for my college applications. I mean, it definitely makes me have a different perspective of life, how people approach me. So, it's just different.

Emma also has to educate people about her identity. People have told her that ‘Hispanics aren't Jewish.’ She has found ways to diffuse, rather than escalate these situations by explaining that Hispanic people can in fact, be Jewish:

> I try not to like, get upset because to me, it's just like, they don't really like, understand what they're saying so, I try to like, educate people, and say like, 'Well, there actually can be like Hispanic Jews. Like, there's like a lot of them. You just like, aren't aware of them, um.'

Caroline, who was adopted from China, is frustrated by people's ongoing failure to recognize her Jewish identity. "People have never seen me as Jewish ever in my life. Not even when I'm wearing a star, like they're like, okay. I always have to tell people." This is upsetting to her, since she first and foremost identifies as an Ashkenazi Jew.

Caroline recently had an experience that was deeply troubling for her. She was on a video chat with her friends and her friend's friends, who live in another country. Caroline's friends introduced themselves as Ashkenazi Jews, and they failed to include her in this description. When Caroline asked her friends about it, they explained that genetically speaking, she is not an Ashkenazi Jew. Caroline has always thought of herself this way, since it is the only culture she has known. She tried to explain her feelings to her friends, but they failed to see her perspective on the issue:

> Basically, my friend's like, 'No, you're technically not [an Ashkenazi Jew], because if you took the 23andMe test your blood or your DNA, won't reflect that.' I don't think they were coming from a bad place at all; I just think they were so focused on the genetic aspect of it like, 'If you took a DNA test it wouldn't be 99% Ashkenazi Jewish.' I was hurt because I consider them my close friends who I've been to Hebrew school with since I was eight years old. I mean it seems so small, but the fact that they weren't willing to have a conversation about it just took me aback and I didn't know how to react. I just really cried a lot.

Caroline understood that her friends were hinging their definition of identity on genetics, rather than her lived experience. She felt hurt by their refusal to consider what she had to say, particularly since they prided themselves on being anti-racist and open to hearing other points of view:

> [They] pride themselves on being socially active and being anti-racist, and I really admire how involved they are in our community as students against gun violence and Black Lives Matter, but then this happens, and it really makes me question their actual devotion to anti-racism because if you are an anti-racist, you wouldn't argue with me about my Jewish identity by saying that I'm not genetically Jewish.

Subfinding 4.1b: The Curse of Triple Marginalization. Miriam feels triply marginalized by her White Jewish peers because she is a lower middle-class Hispanic convert, and they are all White and upper middle-class. While she would like to engage with them, she feels that they are not interested in getting to know her. She relates this to colorism, since her peers talk to another Hispanic girl who has a lighter skin-tone:

> It's difficult to be Hispanic in a White dominated area. It’s not that easy that I converted, because there is another girl who is Hispanic but she's White-passing, and you can tell that they talk to her. She's so sweet. They talk to her, but I'm not really White passing. They don't usually talk to me. They don't really look at me. They tend to ignore me and stuff. I try to talk to them and they look at their friends and talk to their friends instead.

Miriam thinks that her lower-class status could also affect the way her peers treat her. She feels that “Me not having like, a Gucci belt, you could say it's very visibly ‘you're not upper middle-class.’ And I think that does tie into a lot of like, ‘you're Hispanic, so you're poor.’” She would like “more acceptance overall in White dominated spaces, for people to understand that there aren't just White Jews." Miriam wants her Jewish community to know that "a lot of times we feel like our voices are not heard. We feel isolated from our community. We are Jewish and we practice, just like everybody else."

Subfinding 4.1c: Under the Gaze of White People: Intersections of Interlocking Identities. Girls also described feeling that they were under the gaze of White people when they were in Jewish spaces. They felt the need to alter their behaviors and/or change their dress to fit into White-centered environments. This is not to say that they believed in their own racial and/or ethnic inferiority as Jews of Color, but rather, they felt the need to change their behavior to contend with the internalized superiority of White Jews around them.

Girls of color also described feeling judged by White Jews for their appearance. They felt the need to "tone down" their ethnic look for fear of drawing negative attention to themselves.

Yael wants to look "professional" i.e. – not Hispanic – at her synagogue. She explains, "I always want to make sure that like, I'm not wearing like, loud jewelry or like, loud clothes and everything is like, professional business wear section, you know?" She puts a great deal of forethought into her synagogue appearance:

> It's like it's a little embarrassing but yeah, when I move from different spaces, I think about like, how I'm going to do my hair, what I'm going to wear, how I'm going to do my eyeliner and what jewelry I'm going to wear, which I think is you know, obviously, like you think about all those things when you're getting ready for the day but maybe not always with the intent of where will I be taken seriously, and what makes me look like I fit in with this group.

She also worries for her father and brother, whose skin is darker than hers, and whether they will be scrutinized by White members in their synagogue. Though Yael's father worked at the synagogue in various capacities over the years, he is constantly mistaken for a stranger:

> It like, freaks me out. I want to make sure that they look very nice, that they walk in wearing their *kippahs*. You know, I'm like, holding onto them. It freaks me out to think that like, people will see us and think that we don't belong based on the way that we're dressed.

Despite the fact that men of color are subjected to the ongoing forces of criminalization in White spaces, in this case, it seems that Yael is more concerned about protecting her father and brother from psychic injury. She wants to be a neutralizing force for them and make sure they are able to blend into the White-centered culture of their synagogue.

While Miriam is trying to adapt to the norms of her new (Conservative) community, she feels that her curvy Hispanic body betrays her efforts to appear modest. She is struggling to present herself in a way that is comfortable to her, but also, will not offend members of her synagogue:

> There are times when I'll feel guilty about not looking so *tzniut* (modest), because I see other girls in skirts that are so nice and covering shoulders and stuff. Like, that's not really how I dress. And when I go into my synagogue I feel uncomfortable because I want to look traditionally modest. And my body is a little bit more of the traditional Hispanic curvy type and so it's like there’s more of what I have to cover. Other girls who are not as curvy as I am can get away with it, because you can't really see anything, but with me, I am like, trying to cover everything up because everything is so different than other people. Um, yeah.

Miriam wants to feel accepted by members of her community. However, she feels judged by a different set of standards – *their* standards. With no example to draw from, Miriam is left to figure it out on her own. Miriam is internalizing dominant ways of seeing her body as sexual and unruly. At the same time, it could also be that Miriam feels the need to put more effort and care into her appearance than the White girls in her synagogue because she wants to fit in.

Maayan has also been made to feel self-conscious about her appearance. She recalls an unnerving experience she had in New York, when she went on a weekend trip with her religious school class. Due to a scheduling conflict, they did not have time to change before they went to synagogue for Friday night services. Maayan was concerned that her street clothes would conjure racial stereotypes among congregants. Her friends – all of whom were White – were unable to understand why the situation was traumatic for her or offer an empathetic response:

> Like if I'm in a new state, going to a new synagogue or something, I try to look really professional, like wearing a nice dress and like, nice shoes, because I want them to see that I'm not just walking off the streets. I was really nervous because I was wearing a crop top, a hoodie and sweatpants, and I was just supposed to walk into a synagogue probably full of just White people, just no other people of color. I really hated it. I didn't want to go in because I knew that I was gonna be different and all my friends were White. I brought it up to them like, 'Oh, I don't want to go to temple in sweatpants.' But I don't think they connected it to my race. I think they just thought I wanted to look nice, just 'cause it was a synagogue, but it ended up being fine.

Maayan's friends could not relate to the specific challenges she navigated as a Jew of Color and the collateral harm caused by racism. Moreover, her friends could not see how they were perpetuating it through their own ignorance to her struggle.

Jewish girls of color in the study felt that they were denied their authenticity in Jewish spaces due to microaggressions from White Jews. They felt as though they were under the constant surveillance of White people, who dictated norms for socially acceptable standards of dress, style, and behavior. The flip side of this is what some might consider oversensitivity and self-consciousness on behalf of girls. However, it is significant that the girls perceived the interactions the way that they did. These interactions made girls feel uncomfortable and as if they had to justify their existence in Jewish spaces.

Subfinding 4.1d: Girls' Experiences with Overt Racism in Jewish Spaces. Another factor that contributed to girls' discomfort in Jewish spaces came in the form of overt racism, often at the hands of Jewish peers. These experiences inflicted harm and caused emotional distress. They also made Jewish girls feel vulnerable or as if they didn't belong. Four of the ten Jewish girls of color shared experiences with overt racism in Jewish spaces.

When Laila was younger, she attended a synagogue-based religious school. The girls in her class, all of whom were White, made fun of her hair. Despite her best efforts to straighten it, the teasing persisted:

> I got made fun of for like, everything. And like, I remember I got made fun of for my hair, so I tried to straighten my hair and then they would tell me my hair looked weird. But then they told me that like, my hair looked weird when it was straight. So it was just like constantly trying to like, I can't think of the word - just constantly trying to like, make these girls happy. But like, I couldn't make them happy, no matter what I did.

Try as she might, Laila could never be one of them. Laila recalls that the girls not only disliked her hair; they also felt that it hindered their learning environment. "The girls were like, 'I can't see over Laila's hair.' And then the teacher moved me to the back." In retrospect, she thinks that the teacher could have turned the situation into an educational moment to speak about racism and belonging.

Leora also had an incident where she experienced racism from her peers. In the fourth grade, two boys at her former Jewish day school slung a racist chant at her because she could run faster than them in kindergarten:

> I was just hanging out with my friends walking to lunch, and these two boys… we had some resentment towards each other because I could run faster than the both of them in kindergarten…They ran past me and my friends, they turned around, they looked at me, they pulled back their eyes and they said, 'Ching Chong.' I never had been in that situation before, especially since I had grown up with these kids since Pre-K, so I don't know how they harbored that until fourth grade.

Leora did not know what to make of the experience. She was caught off guard, particularly since it was uncharacteristic for students at her school to treat one another this way. She was surprised that the boys' anger against her had been simmering for so many years, and that they chose to share it this way. Leora was already feeling unhappy at her school, and this helped to solidify her reason for wanting to leave.

Yael's brush with racism occurred at a Jewish overnight camp, when a peer lobbed a racial epithet at her brother. They were the only non-White campers, which made her feel out of place, particularly since there were so many Jews in one place. She observed that the only non-White people worked in the kitchen. Yael was also made to feel inferior by her lack of Jewish knowledge:

> The kitchen staff were Black and brown, but we were the only like, campers that I saw. So, there was like, actually like a racial incident. Like a kid called my brother a wetback.

> I was like, ‘He's in middle school.’ I was like, ‘What is going on here?’ So obviously it was very weird. We did not go back. Like even now, I'm like, how could I even unpack that? Like that was wild.

Subfinding 4.1e. Girls of Color Feel Excluded from White-Centered Curriculum: Taking on the Emotional Burden of Teaching White Jews to be Anti-Racist. In addition to their experiences with explicit racism, many Jewish girls of color felt that the Jewish institutions they affiliated with catered to White-centered audiences. Three girls described experiences where they felt alienated from programs and activities that focused on anti-racism since they tended to serve the needs of their White constituencies. Girls observed that they were frequently asked to speak about their experiences as Jews of Color, which required their emotional labor. In some cases, these experiences resulted in microaggressions against them and caused emotional harm. They had few, if any, spaces to process these issues.

Maayan applauds her synagogue’s efforts to become anti-racist. However, she also feels excluded from these programs and that they have become redundant:

> My temple has recently gone on an anti-racism kick where they're just trying to be so nice to everyone all the time. It's good to be conscious of that, but they can like, overdo it a lot. And I'm like, ‘I don't need to be here.’

Girls themselves were sometimes called upon to educate people about their experiences as Jews of Color in White-centered spaces. This was emotionally exhausting for them since they were required to take on the emotional labor of teaching White people about racism. Yael was asked to speak on a panel about racism at her synagogue. She recalls, “I specifically said in my presentation I didn't want an apology. I want action in the form of personal betterment.” She was upset when older White women in the audience, many of whom had committed microaggressions against her, responded with tears and letters of apology. This felt emotionally defeating. She was frustrated with their inability to show personal accountability:

> What are you going to do? Squeeze toothpaste back into the tube? You know there's that Jewish story about you know, you rip the pillow open…It's like you just have to move on, you have to figure out what you're going to do better now. Like, it was like people did not want to recognize that.

Camila tends to speak up in conversations about race. She wants her synagogue peers to understand what it is like to walk through the world as a Jew of Color:

> I share things, even if it's slightly uncomfortable for me. Most of the time I'm not uncomfortable, because it's a community I'm comfortable with – like my friends at my synagogue. But if it's going to come down to kids who know nothing about their own privilege, then I'm gonna want to share because I don't think that's right. I know race is a heavy topic, and I know as a Person of Color I'm more comfortable with race than most White kids my age because I've been talking about it forever. I guess I might start with my bat mitzvah or my experience growing up in [at my temple] to show I am a Jew just like you. I did all this stuff to celebrate Shabbat, all these holidays. And then I'd say, but I also have had experiences with racism and microaggressions that you probably have never had, or [things] you might have said, or done to people by accident, or on purpose – either one, to show that I can still be Jewish. But that doesn't erase or pause my other part of my identity, all the time I wear this Jewish star. And all the time I wear my skin. No yeah, I mean, like all the time I'm always Jewish and I'm always a Person of Color. Neither one pauses to let the other one take more of the stage. Like, they're intertwined, in a way.

Camila is willing to make herself vulnerable so that her peers can understand the complexities she navigates as a Jew of Color and how she experiences her intersectional identities:

Olivia is used to being the only Person of Color in many of the Jewish spaces she occupies. She is involved with several Jewish racial justice initiatives, including the DEI task force at her camp. While she sometimes feels alone in her struggle to create racially equitable spaces, she appreciates that her peers are willing to listen to what she has to say. She sometimes feels the need to check her peers on their internalized racism and their lack of understanding about the serious work it takes to make Jews of Color feel represented in Jewish spaces:

> I was like, you can't put on the page of our website a picture of the one Black Jewish camper so people think we're diverse, because in reality it's me and my other friend who no longer goes. I was the one Person of Color on that task force, and I was constantly hearing people trying to compare Antisemitism to racism and I went off. I was like, ‘You cannot compare these two things. You can hide being Jewish; you cannot hide the color of your skin.’

To her surprise, her peers “were like, `No you're right. I'm sorry that the Jewish community is comparing these things.’ And then they started talking about how the Jewish community needs to take responsibility for the racism that they've put into the world.” Olivia thinks that it is important to speak about the double marginalization she experiences as a Jew of Color and to hold her peers accountable for upholding racism. She is disappointed by the Jewish community’s efforts to respond to racism, which seem reactive and performative, rather than reflective of deep engagement with the issue.

Many girls spoke about the impact of George Floyd’s murder, and the racial reckoning happening across America. While they were aware of the vulnerabilities they held due to their own intersectional identities, they felt that it was their duty to take stock of their own privilege and respond.

Many girls' activism was rooted in their personal experience. They felt compelled to speak up because they struggled with a particular issue and were able to approach it from a position of strength. The rise in anti-Asian hate made Leora acutely aware of the marginalization she faced as an Asian Jew. She was committed to proving her haters wrong and succeeding despite the challenges before her:

> With the rise of the anti-Asian hate crimes at the moment, and then Antisemitism as a whole throughout history it's just something that drives me forward to want to succeed and, of course, like, from women's rights and Civil Rights movement, like all of these just push me forward to succeed, just to prove people wrong.

Subfinding 4.2: White Jewish Girls are Trying to Understand their Intersectional Identities

Eighteen girls in the sample identified as White or White-presenting. Each girl bore a different relationship to Whiteness and her own understanding of what this identity entailed. Most girls felt that their Jewishness intersected with their identity in a way that needed to be accounted for, particularly when they were made vulnerable by the forces of Antisemitism and White supremacy. However, many girls felt that their relationship to Whiteness was conditional; while they were seen to benefit from White privilege, they also experienced discrimination as Jews. Girls expressed discomfort with the ways that others defined them and the way they saw themselves. This depended on a girl's family history, her upbringing, where she lived, and opportunities she had to think about and engage in conversations about race. Girls who were part of cultural heritage groups were also working out the way in which this intersected with their identity.

Subfinding 4.2a: Girls Who Identify as White Face Discrimination as Jews. Mia sees herself as a White person who benefits from privilege. However, she feels that this is a difficult identity to hold when she is subjected to ongoing attacks from activists on the far-left because she is Jewish:

> It's so difficult because it's like I just feel like, stuck all the time. Like you know, I understand my privilege and I'm constantly working to like, understand it more. But at the same time, it's like, I just also want recognition from progressive spaces to say like, I 'Yes, I like look White and all this stuff,' but like you know when it comes down to it, a White supremacist is not going to see me as White, and I'm still threatened by people like that.

Mia would like other activists to recognize that she is made vulnerable due to the forces of White supremacy and Antisemitism. She is bothered by the fact that other people fail to recognize the complexity of her identity when she is working so hard to understand it.

Subfinding 4.2b: Girls Who Do Not Fully Accept the Label of Whiteness. Alexandra does not like comparing people's oppression. She read Peggy McIntosh's (1989) article "White Privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack" and thinks that "positive privileges go away once people realize you're Jewish or like, or people think you're Jewish." Furthermore, "people don't want to listen to Jewish voices." She opposes concepts like intersectionality and Critical Race Theory since they exclude Jews. She thinks that Antisemitism is different than other forms of oppression because it predates slavery and colonization: "Antisemitism has existed longer than racism or like longer than even colonialism or all of these things." Alexandra does not like to refer to herself as White because it fails to encompass the identities she holds as a Jewish Latina:

> I hate calling myself White. Like maybe, I call myself kind of White-passing, but I mean, people can usually tell I'm Jewish….I mean, I don't have White privilege. I've been called a fake Latina because of the color of my skin, and this is just a thing that a lot of like, lighter skin Latinas have faced. I don't think by any means, I face the level of White privilege that WASPs have faced. I don't like the idea of White privilege, because it turns people off to actually doing the necessary things to fight racism.

Subfinding 4.2c: Girls Who Feel Limited by Whiteness. Noa also feels that Whiteness does not capture the extent of her identity. "I feel like just saying White doesn't encompass my entire identity, because probably the biggest facet of my identity is being Jewish. That doesn't mean I'm not White."

Noa describes her relationship to Whiteness as a double negative. She is *not not White.* She feels that this identity provides her with a sense of double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) and informs her understanding of others. At the same time, she would like to have her minority status recognized:

> I do think there's lots of spaces, where like, I need to be more of a listener than a speaker like, especially in spaces where we're talking about racism because I am White. Um, but then sometimes I feel like I'm in spaces, where I talk about my Judaism and then people are like, 'Oh you don't understand what it feels like the minority in this country,' and yes, I don't understand what it means to be a racial minority in this country, but I do understand what it feels like to be a religious minority and that in of itself is its own unique perspective that can be applied to certain situations. But I also know when it's my time to just sit there and observe, you know, and the delicate balance to find it once you find it.

Rachel, whose grandmother was a hidden child during the Holocaust, does not feel comfortable accepting the label of Whiteness:

> Race is a social construct that Jews do not fit into. However, I acknowledge my White privilege and my advantages in society. But on the other hand, like that's not truly how I feel, but it's the way society views me, so it's just like, it's so muddled. It's very difficult to feel White when your ancestors have been 'other.'

Rachel is struggling to come to terms with the ways that other people assign meaning to her experience and how she perceives it to be. While she acknowledges her White privilege, it is difficult for her to accept the label of Whiteness after her family's experience in the Holocaust.

Subfinding 4.2d: Girls Who Acknowledge Whiteness. Claudia is figuring out how her Hispanic identity intersects with her White, Jewish identity. At the same time, she feels that Whiteness has informed the social context of her life. "Both my parents are White, even though my cultural identity is different, like that's still the way that I experienced the world." Claudia is speaking about the White privilege she holds, and the fact that she has not been subjected to racism as a White person.

Some girls were making a concerted effort to respond to racism within their Jewish communities and beyond and figuring out how to navigate these conversations. Seven girls indicated that they were wrestling with difficult issues around racism and accountability. When Taylor participated in a teen program in Israel, she was disturbed by her peers' casual use of the "N-word." She wanted to call them out, but did not feel that she had the confidence to do so:

> There were some racist people there, like some of the White people actively said the N-word. It was really weird and it made me so uncomfortable. I don't like telling people off unless I really know them and that's not my best feature.

Her discomfort points to some of the struggles that White Jewish girls face in balancing their desire for justice over their need for comfort. Mia, participated in a dialogue series with Black and White Jewish teens. She and other participants engaged in difficult conversations about racism and Antisemitism. Mia knows that there are no easy answers, particularly when people's lives and feelings of safety are at stake:

> We talked a lot about like, policing and synagogues. It's just kind of one of those things where I feel like it's such a complicated issue. Like we were saying, you know, we want to make the synagogue actually a welcoming place for everybody. And at the same time, it was like, we feel very threatened. It's like, I know my synagogue's gotten bomb threats before, and I would feel unsafe without police there. Like we want to be accommodating to everybody and be better and like, learn more. But it's like you know, you just have to keep doing your best and so that's why it's like, so hard because there's no like…I don't think there's one right answer, you know…

Mia feels conflicted over her need for safety and that of her Black Jewish peers. She realizes that there are no simple fixes to these deeply rooted issues.

Phoebe also feels that "the stronghold that slavery has had on our country is so immense and it's something that I, as a White person am able to just like exist freely without thinking about my skin color and I think that's sort of an issue like I need to address it more actively."

This finding and subfindings underscore the thoughts and questions that Jewish girls are White are wrestling with as they try to negotiate their relationship to Whiteness. The majority of girls indicated that they felt that Whiteness encompassed part, but not all, of their identities. They wanted to be recognized on behalf of the vulnerability they experienced as Jews, and at the same time, respond to the oppression experienced by People of Color. This suggests that Whiteness means different things to girls. Some girls saw it as part, but not all of their identities. They wanted to take responsibility for the way that they benefited from White privilege. However, they also wanted recognition for the vulnerability and otherness they experienced as Jews. Thus, they experienced themselves as part of Whiteness and apart from Whiteness, depending on the context.

Subfinding 4.3: Girls Who Identify with Multi-Racial/Multi-Ethnic Identities Are Navigating Their Intersectional Identities

Half of the girls (sixteen) identified as having a non-White racial identity and/or multiethnic heritage. Within this group, eight were trying to make sense of their multiple identities. In many cases, girls felt that their White Jewish identity had been privileged over other identities.[101] This largely depended on the ways in which their racial and cultural identities intersected, the extent to which their identities were made visible to others, their exposure to these identities, their family arrangement, and how people around them treated them when they made their racial and ethnic identities known. In some cases, girls' connection to these identities was obvious, and in others, this was less so.

Subfinding 4.3a: Girls Who Are Searching for their "Other" Identity. Claudia was raised in a home where Judaism was emphasized over Latinx culture. Her exposure to her Latinx heritage was compromised by the fact that she did not learn Spanish from her mother. "She didn't consciously think about teaching us Spanish and how that would affect our relationship to her entire identity and family members." Claudia was also bullied by a group of Spanish-speaking

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[101] Some girls were also Sephardic and felt that their Ashkenazi Jewish identities had been privileged over their Sephardic identities. Other girls were Persian. They felt that they were struggling to reconcile their relationship to Persian and American culture.

Latinx girls in her middle school, which reinforced her feelings of alienation from this identity. As Claudia grew older, her Latinx identity felt incomplete and she wanted to learn more:

> I knew that I was connected to my Jewish identity, but I didn't really know how or where to find some of that like, Latinx/Hispanic identity, because I didn't really have a lot of places, a lot of friends, a lot of community members, and I don't speak Spanish, so I kind of felt like there was not really a place for me that was comfortable.

When Claudia entered high school, she became involved in a multicultural club for students. She was able to connect with a group of peers who were also interested in exploring their cultural identities. The space did not feel intimidating because it was structured around diverse cultural experiences. Through her participation in the club, Claudia felt that she could begin to explore this aspect of her identity. Over time, she has come to understand what it means to be a Latinx Jew. She explains, “I know that [my Latinx identity] influences my Jewish identity and like that's how I identify. It feels a lot more cohesive.”

Subfinding 4.3b: Girls Feel Most Comfortable Identifying as Jewish, but There Are Also Contradictions to Their Experiences. Like Claudia, some girls felt most comfortable in Jewish spaces. However, they felt uncomfortable claiming other aspects of their racial and/or ethnic identities. Yael feels that “I can walk okay through a Jewish world, but like, I stumble and fall on the Mexican American side. Maybe I get that idea because I spend all my time like, in a Jewish world.”

Camila “feels” more Jewish than Hispanic, despite her appearance. She identifies as “mixed” to satisfy the curiosity of people who want to put her into a box. However, she is hesitant to claim this identity for herself. This suggests that she feels the need to concede to other people’s ways of interpreting her experience:

> I don't know what it means to truly be Hispanic, to truly be African American. I just know what it's like to be Jewish because both my parents are Jewish and that's what I'm always around. That's the one thing that's consistent for me. Whatever cultures my biological father has aren't mine. They're not the ones I have with my family or I've made with my friends. Like, they're someone else's and I have no use for them. I look Hispanic because of my complexion and my hair; that's about it. I don't speak Spanish. We didn't really have too much Spanish culture in our house, because my mom became distant with her family after her grandparents died. And so my culture was Jewish and if someone asked what my race was, I would have easily said Jewish if I thought that counted, so I identify as mixed now because people want to know what I'm made up of complexion-wise, but I don't feel connected to that as deeply as I do to Judaism.

Camila's sense of identity comes from her family and the traditions she has built with them. She does not feel attached to a particular racial group since she lacks a cultural context to assign meaning to those identities.

Olivia has always felt accepted in Jewish spaces. She feels that she is either "too Black" or "too White" for most other environments. She is not suggesting that the Jewish communities she is a part of are post-racial, but rather, that they see her for who she really is. Olivia has also been made to feel uncomfortable in race-based settings:

> I mean, I'm always "too Black" for the White community and "too White" for the Black community and in the Jewish community, I'm just Jewish. The Jewish community has always just seen me for not my race, not my background, for my Judaism, for my personality, and that's all I could ask for from anyone, so.

At the same time, Olivia is trying to navigate the complexities of her identity as a biracial Jew. While she has experienced microaggressions in Jewish spaces, they are also where she feels most comfortable. Olivia could feel that her peers in the Jewish communities she is a part of are better able to handle matters around race with sensitivity and understanding. Moreover, the adults around her are unable to appreciate the particular challenges she faces due to her in-betweenness.

It is also important to note the contradictions to girls' experiences. In many ways, it makes sense that they felt both held and aggressed by their Jewish communities and their peers. Identity work is messy and confusing, and girls can relate to different aspects of themselves in different contexts and settings. Moreover, their feelings are subject to change over time as they grow and evolve.

Caroline has grown up in environments with mostly (Ashkenazi) Jewish and Hispanic peers. While her [adoptive] parents exposed her to Chinese culture when she was younger, she identifies more strongly with Ashkenazi culture. She sometimes "forgets" that she is Asian. She is trying to figure out how she feels about her Chinese identity:

> For a really long time, I've struggled with identifying as Asian, even though everyone is so quick to know I'm Asian. It's ironic how I sometimes forget that I'm Asian. In a college essay, I was writing about anti-racism and I full-on forgot that I was Asian. I know that I am surrounded by White privilege, but it's confusing because I'm very privileged, but I'm not White, so just navigating the identities has been difficult.

In Caroline's experience, it is easy for her to forget that she is Asian because she has limited access to Chinese culture and people. The only time she is reminded of her identity is when people make her feel "other" because of it. Caroline's "struggle" could indicate her increased awareness of her ethnic identity. However, with few options to explore it, she could be at a stage where her consciousness has been raised, but she is not ready to examine it (Phinney, 1993).

Subfinding 4.3c: Feeling Misunderstood. Girls reported that they sometimes felt misunderstood by parents and peers, who lacked insight into the challenges they faced due to their intersectional identities. Oftentimes, they were the only Jewish Person of Color in their peer group, which could be an alienating experience. While Maayan’s parents do their best to support her, they do not know what it is like to be a biracial Jew “because they've never been there before, so yeah.” Laila feels “confused a lot of the time,” like she has to “decide which group to defend.” She feels that “[her] life would be easier if people didn't stare at me when I walk into a store or stuff like that. It would be easier if I got my holidays off from school and I wouldn't miss a big test.”

When it comes to explaining her experience, Leora says, “I'm half Jewish, half Filipino, so growing up in only Jewish environments, I've struggled to find people that were like me. I'm like a minority of a minority, and never really feel like, represented.” Her mother jokingly calls her a Jew-a-pino.

Dafna feels caught in a similar bind. She explains, “I am a Filipino Jewish queer female, so I'm typically the only person who has that intersectionality, and so it makes it difficult.” She feels that “when you're so intersectional you belong everywhere, and nowhere at the same time. I'm too Jewish to be where I live, but not Jewish enough to be in Jewish spaces.” She could be referring to her non-White appearance, her queerness, or the fact that she does not have the lived experience of being part of a large Jewish community. She feels that she is more interested in exploring Jewish life, religion, and culture than the people around her. The intersection of her identities and her geographic location makes it difficult for her to find others with whom to discuss her shared identities and experiences.

Jordana feels caught between White and Persian culture. She feels alienated from her local Persian community because her values are more progressive than theirs. The Persians at her school call her "*Safid*," or White, a derisive term. Jordana tried to befriend them when she was younger, but they were unkind to her. Jordana's current friend group is mostly White. However, she feels that something is missing from these friendships:

> I love the fact that I'm Persian. I love the food and the family gatherings – there's a really big sense of like, loyalty and community that I love. But I don't really have a lot of Persian friends. I don't feel a part of the community, which has made it really difficult because I tried to kind of work my way into that group, but to be honest, like they were very mean. Like, it was very much like an exclusive club that either you're part of or you're not and I was very much not. Like, I feel like your Persian card can be revoked or given based on who you are. Like, it's funny, they call me the White Persian. I feel like I started to kind of internalize that a little bit in middle school and at the beginning of high school. It made it really difficult to find my place because, I'm too White to be with the Persians but I'm too Persian for the White kids to really understand me, so it's weird because both groups kind of end up being a culture shock in a way, like very detached from who I am, even though they both make up my identities.

Jordana feels as though she is balancing two different cultures; the White dominant culture and her native Persian culture. She does not feel that either represents her complete identity. While Jordana feels connected to aspects of Persian culture, she is made to feel like an outsider due to the way that other Persian people in her community experience it.

Anna is also trying to figure out where to place herself with regard to her Cuban identity. She wants to be able to access her Cuban heritage in a way that is meaningful to her but does not offend People of Color. When she tells people about her Cuban identity, they usually tell her that she cannot be Cuban because she is Jewish and White. She feels like this is an affront to her identity:

> I've kind of never really known where I fit, 'cause like most of my Jewish friends are you know, like Ashkenazi White. Like, I mean, I'm very White-passing. Like, I don't really feel like I count as a Person of Color either, so I never really quite know where I go with everything. Like, I've told people I'm Cuban and like they'll go, ‘Oh no you can't be Cuban, you're Jewish. You can't be, like you know.’ Like they try to explain my own family history, which is just very irritating and stuff. But it's just this odd feeling. Like whatever I do, I'm like, disrespecting someone. Like, I feel like I don't really belong in spaces with other Jews of Color, with other People of Color, 'cause I feel like I'm too White for that. Then I'm ignoring a part of my family history, and I'm ignoring a part of my family. And like, that's disrespectful to them. So like, I really don’t quite know where to go and I'm like, always going back and forth about like, how I should define myself. And how I should consider myself like, with Judaism. And like, with being Cuban and like, how that all works.

Anna’s White skin color makes her feel uneasy about claiming this identity. She feels that she has limited options to explore what it means to be a Cuban Jew due to the way that other people define her experience. Anna’s respect for others can come at the expense of her own identity.

This sub-finding explains the complicated identity work girls are doing to explore their intersectional racial and/or identities.

Subfinding 4.4: Girls Are Evaluating the Impact of Gender on Their Lives

The girls in the study were evaluating dominant ideas about gender and wrestling with the knowledge that their gender, and other aspects of their identities – such as their race, age, and/or ethnicity, made people perceive them in ways that were limiting and objectifying. Some girls spoke about experiences they had where they or their peers were made to feel vulnerable because they were girls. Others feared that they could face obstacles in the future because of their gender. As Sivan looks to the future, she worries about the culture of sexual toxicity in the workplace. “I am particularly frustrated by the sexualization/objectification of women in workplace/professional settings. I know I may encounter situations in which I will be expected to use sex to curry favor with men in power. This prospect saddens and intimidates me.”

Some girls/participants felt limited by binary understandings of gender, which failed to explain the complexity of their experience since they did not fit into the binary. Liana feels that their gender unfairly impacts the way people perceive them. This happens in their family and in the religious communities in which they participate. They find this particularly frustrating. While they do not offer a reason for their mercurial behavior, it could stem from their struggle to feel heard and seen:

> I tend to present myself as either super confident and not giving an “F” about what anyone thinks, or as a rule-following child. I’ve had all sorts of people treat me different because of my sex. I’ve had family do it, thinking that my opinions don’t matter. I’ve been denied chances in my Jewish life because people see me as a female.

Liana feels that they are treated a particular way by their family and religious community because of the way they understand gender.

The majority of girls were committed to advocating for their rights as girls and women.

Subfinding 4.4a: Taking a Critical Stance to Jewish Spaces. Sivan briefly participated in a youth group. She became critical of the way the culture celebrated girls' sexualization and objectification, and she decided to take a stand against it. She was surprised to learn that her friends were not bothered to the extent that she was. They were perhaps excited by the attention they received from boys, or able to separate their feminist values from their desire to have fun:

> The cheers were just so misogynistic and sexualized and it was more just the sense that this was okay, that this was cutesy and fun and people were like, deriving this kind of like, twisted empowerment from like chanting how like, worthless they were. I just found that so problematic. Like, there's one that like, glorifies prostitution and I was not impressed with how everyone dresses the same. Everybody is doing what the next girl is doing. When the boys come, you have to sit on their lap. I didn't like what I saw and I wasn't about to start to rationalize it to myself. It was kind of like the line was drawn in the sand. And I knew I wasn't going to continue tolerating it, but then all of my like really close friends were super involved in their youth groups, and so I had tolerance for the fact that they were having a very different experience, or they were able to compartmentalize aspects of it that I just was not in a position to compartmentalize. And so that was challenging.

Twenty-nine out of thirty girls in the survey identified as feminists. Some of the girls Jewish girls of color also discussed their relationship to Jewish girlhood. They felt that their skin color made them seem less desirable to their male peers.

Maayan and Yael both were concerned that their skin color made them seem "unlovable" or "unattractive" to male peers. Yael feels that "people don't really like want to marry converts or marry like Jews of Color." Despite the fact that her parents are happily intermarried, she feels that she will be unable to “find [her] soulmate in Judaism [because she does not] fit the picture of what people are expecting.” In Maayan’s experience, “[boys] treat me differently than they do to White women because they don't see me as important or worthy of time and love, as they do my White friends. it's just such a different experience.” They were concerned that their racial and/or ethnic identities would make them seem less desirable to members of the opposite sex.

Leora had a humiliating experience where the boys in her youth group made racist and sexist comments about her dress, which made her feel uncomfortable about what she was wearing. They compared her to a geisha girl:

> It was blue and it had flowers on it, and I think I got several comments relating to the fact that I’m Asian and I'm wearing this dress. It was just fairly uncomfortable. I liked it a lot [the dress] and I haven't worn it since. I think I actually got rid of it.

The boys made Leora feel uncomfortable in her clothes, and as if she could no longer wear them. This shows a few of the ways in which gender interacts with other marginalized identities girls hold, and can make them feel violated, disrespected, and unseen.

Subfinding 4.4b: Body Image. The topic of body image came up during one of the White girls’ focus groups. Jordana discussed how she got her period at a young age and the shame she felt about going through discomfort she felt in her own body. She felt that she had to hide this from her community, for fear of causing shame to herself and her family. This served as the impetus for her activism, which seeks to alleviate period poverty for girls and women in impoverished communities:

> I got my period when I was nine. I dealt with like, very extreme and debilitating pain, where I was missing like, weeks of school, I had to go on birth control at twelve. Like, that entire thing mentally and physically, for me, was very difficult. And so it was

> something that I was too ashamed to like, talk about just because I knew that, like the Persians around me would be like, talking behind my back and be like, ‘Oh my God like, did you hear.’ It was always something that was very like, ‘Hush hush,’ that you don't ever talk about.

This seemed to help the other girls develop a language of transparency and trust when speaking about their relationship with their own bodies. The discussion was very open and candid. Many girls shared that at some point, they had internalized negative messages about their bodies or failed to receive adequate education about their own development.

Simone discussed how her relationship with her body changed over time. For a long time, she internalized her family’s and community’s expectations of how her body should look.

> Russian girls are supposed to be very thin, you know all their lives, so you can be very beautiful. So I guess when I was a younger girl I wasn't as thin as my relatives were, and they were like, ‘Why isn’t she as thin as the other Russian girls?’ So I guess that's like another reason why I've struggled with body issues. But you know, growing up, I was in dance, I was in ballet, and you know, being in those sports I would see the girls, you know, and compare myself, and you know, I do believe it was so toxic, yeah. I was being very hard on myself and always like saying I'm not good enough and you know, a big part of my love journey was getting confidence in myself, and you know, realizing that I am like an amazing person.

Olivia dislikes social media because of the ways it can promote negative body image. She has developed strategies to protect herself from falling prey to its unhealthy messages “I only follow people who have similar body types as me like for like, influencers. I'm not going to follow an influencer who makes me feel bad about myself.”

This suggests that the girls are heavily impacted by dominant messaging about normalcy and attractiveness, some of which are conveyed by their friends and family members, and they are employing strategies to resist them. Girls' experiences are heavily mediated by their cultural background, which is important to consider when understanding the diverse experiences of Jewish adolescent girls.

Subfinding 4.4c: Feeling Vulnerable and Misunderstood. Girls discussed experiences where they or their peers had been subjected to the forces of sexualization, which made them aware of the need to be hypervigilant. Daniella feels that "just by being a girl I am faced with a perception from other people that is probably different than I perceive myself." Daniella recalls a terrifying experience where someone filmed her from behind at a mall. With a friend's support, she approached a security officer to report the incident. She felt violated and concerned:

> The thought that he still has that video of me today makes me feel sick. Women have so many experiences just like mine or worse. This is solely due to my gender and how men perceive women. It's disrespectful, saddening and scary.

This experience affirmed Daniella's belief in feminism, with the goal of "fighting towards a goal of gender equality. It is also really important to me that it is intersectional." Daniella thinks that it is important to advocate for the rights of all women.

Amira narrowly escaped an attack from a male attacker in a public bathroom. She used self-defense techniques she learned from karate to remove herself from the situation. This made her realize how important it is "...to teach girls there's so many different situations and just bad people out there, and you have to be prepared." Amira is trying to establish her own sense of self, apart from other people's expectations of her. She feels that:

> As girls I think we're really considered naive, and you know, people like to think that they can push us around a lot. And you know, there is some truth to it. I mean, we're still trying to figure out who we are and then you have these people trying to tell us who we are and pull us into something, and you know, we don't want all these people trying to like, pull us a certain way. We just want to find out who we are. And I think that's where a lot of the struggle really comes from.

Amira feels that people treat her differently because she is a girl. While she was able to overcome her attacker and exercise tremendous physical and mental strength during a moment of crisis, she has a harder time figuring out what she wants and being able to articulate her needs in her daily life. She identifies this with being female. However, she is committed to her process of self-discovery.

Subfinding 4.4d: Jewish Girls of Color Are Sexualized, Bullied, and Maligned at School. Girls also had experiences where their peers sexualized and disrespected them, and they received little protection from the adults who were supposed to keep them safe. Yael had a humiliating experience occur at her school that was sexist, racist, and Antisemitic. She was made to feel particularly vulnerable because it seemed as if her entire school was in on the joke except for her. When she was a freshman, a peer used an anonymous APP to post a picture of her and captioned it: “Thick Jew,” which referred to the fact that she had “junk in her trunk,” or a “thick Latina behind.” The picture traveled through the entire school body without her knowledge, until she recognized her sweater on a classmate’s phone. “I was like, ‘great this is nice.’ And, of course, you can't do anything because it's an anonymous messaging APP. So, like, wherever I go like, I’m always gonna be like, too much and uncomfortable.” Yael realized that she could not change the way her classmates responded to the situation. Rather, she could only change herself by pretending not to care. Lockdown happened shortly after, for which she was grateful. Yael felt embarrassed that her classmates sexualized her and showed little regard for her dignity.

Laila feels that she is singled out by administrators at her school for dress code violations. She perceives the dress code as being inequitably applied, where White girls are able to wear what they want, and girls of color are frequently called out. After a number of dress code violations, her principal told her that teachers are afraid to approach her because she is "too aggressive." He called her mother, who jumped to her defense. "She would be like, I saw her. She's fine. Leave my daughter alone." Laila does not plan to alter her style of dress. Rather, she plans to keep fighting back with her mother's support.

Subfinding 4.4e: Jewish Girls' Feminist Activism. Dafna thinks that it is essential to "fight for equality and equity for all gender identities with all intersecting identities." Some girls were doing this by advocating on behalf of their gender in their schools and in Jewish spaces. Others were showing agency through acts of resistance, or by defying previously held stereotypes about girls. This held different meaning for girls, based on their racial and/or ethnic group, gender identity, sexual identity, class background, geographic location, religious affiliation, family arrangement, school, and the way that these identities intersected.

Ella, who first learned about feminism at camp, became inspired to start her own feminist group. A turning point for her occurred when one of her counselors read Jessica Valenti's *Full Frontal Feminism* to her bunk. She felt something awaken within her:

> We read *Full Frontal Feminism* [at camp]. It was like a girls' night or something. We read a chapter, just like introducing us to women's empowerment and we're all like, 'this is amazing!' And, like every day we would read it. And it just really like, introduced me to it [feminism]. And then we would just have discussions about like, how crazy it was –

> like how sexist our society was. And I just think that really like pushed me to realize how I need to be a strong feminist in the society we live in.

When Ella returned home from camp, she and a friend began to offer a monthly feminist program for Jewish girls their age. They hosted meetings over Zoom where they talked about issues that were important to them. They also invited guest speakers to speak about Jewish feminist issues.

Jordana started an organization to respond to period poverty in developing countries. Her interest grew from her own experiences with early puberty and the backlash she faced from others about her changing body. Upon discovering that period poverty was an international public health crisis, she launched a school-wide project to collect menstrual supplies for women and girls in developing countries. This work not only enabled her to help countless scores of girls and women, but also, to destigmatize her own experience:

> I learned that like, girls in other countries also have to skip school because of their periods, but the difference is that I had access to healthcare and medical products, and you know, birth control and all these other things, and they don't. So, I was really like, empowered to start opening up about my story, and my experience. It's only now like within the past year and a half that I'm so openly like sharing that with people.

Jordana now feels that she can talk about her own issues with early menstruation to benefit people who are unable to access necessary supplies.

This shows how girls are attuned to the way that their gender impacts the way that they are perceived in Jewish and non-Jewish spaces. The girls were evaluating these messages and making sense of them for themselves. Many had experienced how gender could impact their safety and the opportunities that were available to them. Moreover, when combined with their race, religion, gender, sexual, ethnic and class-based identities, they could pose additional opportunities and challenges to their lives. While girls felt limited by their gender, these boundaries also seemed permeable. Many girls were speaking up for their rights and the rights of others, albeit, with a certain level of uncertainty.

Finding 5: Jewish Girls Need Connection And Support

While many of the girls were extraordinary in their own right, they were no different from other girls in the fact that they were also seeking approval and validation from others around them, including their parents, teachers, communities, and peers, and navigating complicated lives. In some cases, girl and women activists have been portrayed as one-dimensional or “superhuman,” as if they have somehow escaped the need for human connection, which belies the complexity of their experience as individuals (Brown, 2016; Taft, 2011). While the girls were privileged in many ways – they lived in financially stable homes, they were loved, they had access to decent if not high-quality education, and nutritious foods, they had friends and access to multiple support systems, they were also carrying the emotional burden of speaking out against contentious issues. In some cases, they were also navigating complex identities which few other people, even within their families, could relate to. Other girls also had mental health diagnoses, and cognitive limitations which posed additional challenges to their lives. While the girls expressed resilience and a strong sense of conviction in their beliefs, they described moments of hardship and struggle from bullying, alienation, and exclusion. Conversely, they also shared experiences where they felt held and supported by their peers. Girls also felt confused about the future. They felt as though they needed to have everything “figured out,” and they needed guidance in doing so.

Subfinding 5.1: Alienation and Exclusion in Jewish Settings

Liana was bullied by their day school peers from first through seventh grade. It got worse over the years, particularly after their two closest friends left the school. They describe the experience as “just horrible. I was so bullied, no one would be friends with me.” Liana attributes this to the fact that they were not afraid to express their individuality. “I was all alone, and it was really sad and everyone found any chance to bully me. I was different than them.” They have since reflected on the situation, and think that their classmates might have been threatened by their independence. “[They] were being exactly the same, and it ma[de] me feel weird about myself because I'll be like, I don't want to be like these people.” Things got better after they left the school. Liana feels that their being different caused them to be alienated by their classmates. Despite their boldness and willingness to speak up, Liana was also sad that none of their classmates treated them with kindness.

Some girls, like Morgan, struggled to find a sense of Jewish peer group in her small community. She explains that the first youth group she tried was populated largely by a group of “cliquey” kids, many of whom attended the same private school. She explains:

> There's one private school in town and that's where the majority of Jewish kids go. I almost went there myself and it's not a religious school. It's an independent school. It's just kind of a coincidence but um, that social environment is not the most positive place either, so that's why I did not go there. There are free floaters, like they have their group of friends and they finally found super nice people but they've kind of struggled to get along with everyone else, because there's just tougher social kids at that school.

Morgan tried attending a youth group event that was attended by many Jewish students from the private school. Her experience was that, “I got bullied. There were some really nasty kids and those are the kids that kind of dominate the social environment.” She eventually found a different youth group that she likes. “A lot of the kids I've met through youth group are the kinds of people that are just quirky and kind and who want to learn more about the world.” Morgan feels like she can be herself in her youth group, and she doesn’t have to worry what other people think.

Ariella also attended a youth group event where she was made to feel alienated and alone. She did not know anyone and she sat by herself all evening. She joined another youth group where she feels valued and included:

> The event that I went to was like the kickoff event, and it was like, on a yacht. It was like, basically just like this party. I had a friend who was really involved with it. Her friends weren’t interested in talking to me. They just wanted to talk to her. I just ended up sitting, like in the back, because no one was like, trying to become our friend. So it was really frustrating, and I was like, I'm not going to another event. That was like, such a waste of my time.

Ariella was made to feel alone and “other” at the Jewish youth group event. She sat by herself and no one talked to her. This was a humiliating experience for her and she vowed never to return.

Yael shares how she felt pressure to hook-up in one youth group, which made her feel uncomfortable. She joined another youth group, where she felt validated and secure in her identity:

> I would not describe myself as a sexual person. In a Reform youth group context, I felt pressure to be sexual. After joining a Conservative youth group, I did not feel that

> pressure, which has allowed me to figure out what my sexual identity meant/means to me.

This suggests that girls feel excluded from communities for reasons such as pressure to be sexual and because they feel that peers are unkind to them. At the same time, it also shows that girls are unwilling to compromise who they are to appeal to the dominant norms of these communities.

Subfinding 5.1a: Feeling Valued and Supported. Many girls also described Jewish youth spaces as a tremendous source of support and relationship-building. They felt that the friendships they derived from youth groups, camps, Jewish informal education programs, Israel trips, and day schools were unparalleled to others. They also felt enriched by the learning they derived from these communities.

Samantha feels that her synagogue youth group provides her with a greatly needed reprieve from “toxic” high school culture:

> Being part of a community that's Jewish, you don't have to worry about what people think of you. You just can be 100% yourself and not worry about what the popular girls are going to think, or about whether a guy thinks you're doing it for yourself and for everyone else in the religion and honestly it's just the fact that everyone who I know who participates in youth group is so freakin’ nice and so open. Being in high school, I assume you can figure out how that is…even though I haven't experienced that type of thing personally. I would still rather keep my distance from those types of people who are just toxic.

Samantha feels that she can be her authentic self in her youth group. She attributes this to the fact that it is a Jewish community that is based on trust and connection. While she has not experienced high school drama, she prefers the “safe” environment offered by her youth group.

Olivia agrees; she feels that “the energy that you get when you're there [at youth group] around all your friends is amazing. I have not been in a community that has matched how it makes me feel.” For Anna, her youth group provides her with a platform to direct her activism and effect social change. She recently facilitated a program on mass incarceration and its disproportionate impact on People of Color. The program was well-received and she was glad to have made a difference in her community. Anna tries to run as many social justice programs as possible with her youth group.

Simone, who began attending Jewish summer camp two years ago, describes her camp friends as her “best friends. We talk every night.” This speaks to the strength of the relationships she developed at camp and what can happen when girls are given the opportunity to build deep and trusting connections.

This speaks to girls’ need for validation and support. It also indicates that their sense of self is relationally-driven and constantly in flux. Many of the girls explained how they were changed by their peers in Jewish settings and how they became enriched by the connections they derived from these settings. In other cases, they stated that they were made to feel less than because their ideas or ways of being in the world were unconventional. As a result, they had to remove themselves from the Jewish communities they were a part of. In some cases, they found ones that better suited their needs. This shows that being part of a Jewish community was important to them. Sivan, for example, became involved with a Jewish girls’ feminist program. She felt nurtured by the relationships she developed with her peers.

Subfinding 5.2: Talking about Mental Health

Girls also spoke openly about the need to be proactive about self-care strategies. They discussed diagnoses that they have, help that they have gotten, and advocacy that they engage in to destigmatize mental health issues. A few of the girls mentioned that they attend therapy, and others mentioned that they are part of mental health clubs at school. They also discussed activities they perform to maintain their overall wellness, such as exercising, hanging out with friends, and making art. Emma emailed to tell me that she was unable to participate in the focus groups because of mental health issues. Girls spoke of the emotional impact of the sociopolitical moment, as well as school stress, family tension, racism, COVID-19, and worrying about the mental health of loved ones.

Taylor shared that she struggles with anxiety. She is regimented about seeing her therapist every week, as it helps to keep her balanced:

> I have anxiety. I go to therapy once a week, and so I mean, I consider it like a doctor's appointment. When my friends are like, ‘Can you hang out? I don't say no, I have a doctor's appointment. I say no; I’ve got therapy.’

Rachel has a history of mental health issues in her family. Her own mental health issues began when started to question her sexuality. While she is grateful to have her parents’ support, she feels as though she lost a lot of her childhood to her mental health:

> I’ve struggled with anxiety and depression in the past. Um, it's one of those things. If you look at my family, like everyone has something. Things got really bad when I was in like, fifth grade, when you know, I started to question my sexuality. Like, my parents are incredibly supportive and that kind of opened up the fact that I like, the depression and anxiety that I face is biological and I mean, it's not necessarily ever going to be gone. In certain ways I feel as though, like my childhood was taken away from me, because I had to deal with those problems. But on the other hand, it definitely made me mature faster.

Ella also struggles with mental health issues. She attributes this to the chaos in her life, including her parents' divorce, and her tendency to overcommit. Ella is trying to gain a sense of control over her anxiety, rather than allow it to dictate the course of her life:

> I struggle with anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). I go to therapy for it, like every week. I will say, like it has been affected by the divorce. Like, when I was young, that's like when I initially went to therapy for anxiety; and then took a break. Like, I went there for two years, probably took a break and then went back as soon as high school started, and then I got diagnosed with OCD. It's just hard to like, move your life every week, especially with like, other mental health issues. But like, there's no way around it, you know. I am very busy, like I take on way too much. I had the SAT yesterday, which did not go well. I continue to progress over the years and, just like not let my anxiety define me.

Some girls felt that it was important to use their own experiences to erase the stigma around mental health issues. Samantha, has anxiety and depression, used to feel ashamed about revealing these aspects of herself. However, she realized that she could empower other people to feel less inhibited about their own struggles:

> I've had my own mental health struggles. I have diagnosed anxiety. I have depression. So I've become a big activist for breaking the stigma because I didn't like talking about it before, and then I realized that I should want to talk about it because everybody has these problems, it's very important to talk about it in order to educate and help other people struggling with the same things.

Liana also agreed. Her mother doesn't like it when she discusses her mental health issues. However, she sees it as an essential part of herself, and one that is best to be open about:

> I have very bad depression and anxiety. I'm very open about my anxiety, which my mom

> kind of hates. In my bat mitzvah thank you speech, I talked about my anxiety. I'm very open about it. The thing is, I will over analyze everything, and I think that's helpful. I mean there are some things I don't like about anxiety. I don't like panic attacks. Like it affects my life; it affects my choices, it affects my personality and what I say. Like, I want to talk about my anxiety, but like my mom's like, you shouldn't talk too much about it.

Subfinding 5.2a: Trying to Figure it Out. Girls also talked about the stress that they are carrying from school and other aspects of their lives. They talked about classes that they are taking, pressure from standardized tests, and their hopes for the future. Leora shared that "I've been overwhelmed for the past week, with just work calls and school and homework and all of that. And then I guess social life as well." Most of the girls appeared to be college-bound and they were looking steadily to the future, despite the obstacles that stood in their way.

Daniella is worried that she is supposed to have her life figured out by now and she doesn't know what she wants to do:

> Sometimes there's pressure from different people in my life. My school has a lot of academic pressure and is very competitive and so like, I don't know. I had a meeting with my counselor today and she was like, 'What are all the colleges I want to go to?' And all that, and I was like, 'I didn't know.' And it's just such like, a common question now. It's just like, people already have like, their lives down. I just really don't. Yeah."

Tova also feels that her life is in flux. She explains:

> I'm still trying to figure out what college plans and stuff. I'm excited for that, but I have to figure out where I want to go to college, and that's very hard. And I don't know what I want to study or anything. I'm just trying to figure that out, and it's hard. I don't even

> really know what kinds of things would be good for me and what kinds of environments would work best, so that's also very hard.

Shira’s father only let her apply to schools that were near family and she had not been accepted to any of them. She was trying to weigh her options.

> My dad is really specific about what state I'm allowed to move to. If it's up to him, I'm not allowed to leave, period. I've looked at other schools but because I'm limited to a few places. There's not really too much I can look at.

She figures that she will attend community college for a year and then reapply to the schools where she was rejected.

As Claudia makes her way through the world, she knows that her voice matters. However, it isn’t always heard. She feels that people need to listen to the wisdom of young people and encourage their activism.

> It can be very discouraging when you feel like you're doing something that has meaning and you feel confident in yourself and you’re making an impact. Girls and adolescents both kind of learn that they aren't really impactful or what they do is less significant. We don't learn about activists that are young, but like they're everywhere. I definitely feel inspired by them and have more empathy and understanding for what challenges and dedication they have.

Summary

In this chapter, I explained how the Jewish girls in the study were wrestling with and contending with multiple aspects of their identities, including their religious identities, their racial and ethnic identities, their gender identities, their sexual identities, what it meant to be Jewish, and what it meant to have a relationship with Israel. In one moment, they could feel seen and heard, and in the next, they could feel invisible, silent, silenced, or simultaneously a sense of internal conflict with competing aspects of their identities. The way that the girls perceived themselves, and what they believed to be true changed according to place and context. Each girl was navigating her own complicated identity that was shaped by a multiplicity of factors, including where she lived, her religious upbringing, her family arrangement, her school, her friend group, her mental and physical health, and a variety of other factors, including her race, her ethnicity, her gender and sexual identity, and her socioeconomic status. The findings show that Jewish identification impacted girls' meaning-making processes in significant ways. This theme presents itself in each of the findings. This underscores the difficult self-work, reflection, and exploration that comes with Jewish activist girls' identity development. Below, I review the findings and share my theoretical understanding for how Jewish activist girls navigate their relationship to voice, visibility and representation.

Religion

Girls were actively examining what it meant to be Jewish. They were asking questions about God's existence, faith, and perceived gender inequalities in Judaism. Whether they were raised with religion or they were coming into it on their own, they were trying to establish their own Jewish identities. For some girls, this meant questioning the values and beliefs they were raised with, and for others, it meant experimenting with other forms of Judaism and thinking about what they wanted for themselves. They were struggling to navigate structural boundaries imposed by traditional Judaism's patriarchal design. Many of the issues girls were contending with stemmed from what they perceived to be women's inferior status in Orthodox Judaism, as indicated by their use of the word "inequality."

Antisemitism, Conflict with Israel, and Navigating Relationships with Israel

Many girls were struggling with how to respond to Antisemitic and/or negative incidents against Israel in their schools, with their peers, and online. They were also figuring out how to navigate their relationship with Israel. At times, they were concerned about when and how to speak up about these issues due to a perceived lack of allyship from peers and adults, and because they did not want to draw negative attention to themselves. Girls also spoke about the emotional harm caused by Jewish invisibility – they longed for validation and support from friends and teachers, yet they did not know how to ask for it. At times, they felt isolated and confused. The girls viewed Israel as an important homeland for Jewish people. However, some were critical of its government and frustrated that they were associated with its actions. They wished that people would listen to what they had to say.

Navigating the World as an Identified Jew

Girls are thinking about what it means to show Jewish identity and to look like a Jew. Given the prevalence of Antisemitism and animosity toward Israel, girls had mixed feelings about revealing signs and symbols of their Jewish identity. Some girls feared for their safety and chose to hide their Jewish identity in public. Other girls felt that it was important to show their identity as a sign of resistance. Regardless of the decisions girls made, they were made vulnerable because of this identity. Whether they choose to name it, wear it, or associate themselves with it, they chose to behave in particular ways because of it, by either wearing *kippot* or showing Stars of David, or hiding their symbols of Jewish identity depending on the context.

Making Sense of Intersectional Identities

Many girls were figuring out their racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities and how they intersected with their Jewishness. Many girls described possessing a unique identity and feeling misunderstood by others around them.

Jewish Girls of Color. Girls with non-White identities spoke about how they were sometimes made to feel other or less-than in Jewish spaces. They felt that they were subjected to norms of dress and behavior that were established by White Jews for White Jews. Girls shared experiences with microaggressions that occurred in Jewish spaces and how they had to carry the emotional labor of educating White Jews about racism. They felt that they had to work harder to prove that they belonged in Jewish communities than White Jews, and how they sometimes worried about their safety. At the same time, some Jewish girls of color felt uniquely connected to their Jewish identities, to their Jewish communities, and their rich lived experiences.

White Jewish Girls. Jewish girls who were White had multiple feelings about accepting the label of Whiteness. Some girls felt as though Whiteness did not fully account for their identity when they were also made vulnerable to the forces of Antisemitism and anti-Zionism. Other girls felt that their being Jewish provided them with a unique lens to view the struggles of others, and others did not accept the label of White. They felt different from other White people since they were differentiated from them because of their religion and ethnicity. Many girls were struggling with their relationship to White privilege and figuring out how to balance this against the marginalization they experienced as Jews. Regardless of how they felt about their own racial identity, several Jewish girls who identified as White felt that it was their responsibility to play a role in uprooting racism.

Racial and Ethnic Identity. Girls were also trying to make sense of their racial and ethnic identities. This was a unique process for each girl that depended on where she lived, the way that people perceived her, her family arrangement, and the opportunities she had to explore this aspect of identity. Girls who represented multiple races and ethnicities described feeling that people's perceptions of them fell short of the ways that they saw themselves. Their skin color did not justify their experience when they carried such complex intersectional identities.

Gender and Sexual Identity. Girls were also making sense of their sexual and gender identities. They were thinking about what it meant to occupy the role of girl and to be read as Jewish girls. This held different meanings for girls, based on their gender identity, their sexual orientation, their race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and their life experience, and the way these identities interacted with one other. Despite their tremendous achievements, girls also encountered systemic barriers that made it challenging for them to actualize aspects of their activism. In some cases, they were not listened to by adults. They also faced sexism, homophobia, and limitations due to COVID-19, lack of allyship, time, and the realization that there was only so much they could do. This shows the different ways that girls were evaluating messages about what it meant to be a Jewish girl, the different messages they received, and how they responded to them with their words, actions, and activism.

Navigating Complexities

The last finding shows that while the girls were extraordinary in many ways – as demonstrated by their activism, their deep engagement with the world around them, and their struggle to find themselves, they were in many ways, much like other girls who wanted to feel validated, appreciated and seen. While the girls stood by their insights and convictions, they also described moments of loneliness and isolation. This speaks to the relational nature of activist girls' development. Girls also described the feelings of strength and support they derived from Jewish communities, which underscores the importance of connection during this stage in life.

Theoretical Finding

This was a study conducted with a group of thirty-two affiliated Jewish girl activists. They were committed to figuring out who they were and improving conditions for those around them. They were upstanders and change-makers who were wrestling with issues of inequity and injustice, some of which personally affected their lives. The findings from the data analysis process help to form the theory that Jewish identification has a significant influence on the way that Jewish activist girls relate to voice, action, and meaning-making. While Judaism did not surface in every data point, it emerged as a major theme in the majority of issues that girls spoke about as they made sense of their identities and endeavored to change the world. It also informed the issues girls cared about, how girls felt that others perceived them, and how they perceived themselves. In the next chapter, Chapter Six, I share my discussion of the findings and also, strategies and suggestions for continuing this important work with Jewish girls. I also discuss the limitations of the study, implications of the research, and my conclusion of the study.

Chapter 6: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

This grounded theory study examined how Jewish activist girls navigated their relationship to voice, visibility, and representation in their everyday lives. I was curious to understand the joys and complexities of their lived experiences as Jewish girl activists, the barriers they faced, and how they exercised resistance against them. Another goal of my research was to decenter narrow understandings of White middle-class Jewish girlhood by highlighting the stories and experiences of Jewish activist girls from a racially, socioeconomically, and culturally diverse sample and adding them to the literature on Jewish girls. The girls in my dissertation came from a variety of racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and geographic backgrounds. They had different Jewish upbringings, and each girl's experience differed from the next. My intention was not to "help" the girls but rather to make their diverse experiences known.

In the previous chapter, I shared the five major findings from the 32 semi-structured interviews, five focus groups, and 30 surveys that I conducted with the girls. Finding 1 described the challenges experienced by girls who affiliated with traditional forms of Judaism and how they responded to them. Finding 2 explained how girls perceived and responded to Antisemitism and criticism of Israel, as well as how they came to terms with their own personal relationship with Israel. Finding 3 revealed how girls felt about making their Jewish identities known. Finding 4 described how girls were exploring the intersections of their identities and making sense of them. Finding 5 revealed girls' need for support across multiple aspects of their lives.

In this chapter, I present an analysis of the findings with subfindings integrated into the appropriate finding. It is supported by relevant literature from Chapters 1 and 2. I weave these together to generate theory that describes how the Jewish activist girls in the study experienced their relationship to voice, visibility, and representation (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I discuss the theory, its applications, and future directions for this research. I also share the limitations of my study.

The findings from my study served to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Jewish activist girls navigate their relationship to visibility, voice, and representation?

RQ2: What are the unique challenges experienced by Jewish girl activists?

RQ3: How do Jewish girl activists exercise resistance against the challenges they experience?

Identity Development

The Jewish activist girls in the study were trying on and performing different identities, a typical hallmark of adolescence (Butler, 1990; Erikson, 1968; Jenkins, 2008). Developmental theorists have long proposed that an adolescent's sense of self is largely driven by the way she feels that others perceive her (see Cooley, 1902; Gilligan, 1990; Lamb & Brown, 2006). Cooley (1902) refers to this as the "looking-glass self." Identity development is further complicated by the fact that adolescents hold multiple and sometimes overlapping identities that can change over time, thus constituting the concept of "fluid" identity (Branje et al., 2021; Jenkins, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). Some of these identities may include daughter, granddaughter, sister, and members of a racial group, ethnic group, religion, sports team, and school community (McAdams, 1993; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Tatum, 2000). These identities are socially and culturally contingent and can compel girls to behave in particular ways according to context (Sirin & Fine, 2008). For example, girls may act differently with their friends than with their grandparents. These identities may take on different meanings depending on the context (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

The Jewish activist girls in the study were navigating multiple identities, which impacted how they presented themselves in certain situations, what they said, what they felt, questions they struggled with, and causes they cared about. For some girls, their Jewishness was more salient than others, and their way of relating to this identity depended on where they were and who they were with. According to Hall (1990), individuals construct a "narrative of self" to knit the multiple aspects of themselves together into a cohesive self. The girls' experiences were informed by a constellation of factors, including where they lived, their family arrangements, the Jewish communities they were a part of (if they were), their religious upbringing, their gender and/or sexual identity, race/ethnicity, educational experiences, peer group, physical health, emotional health, social class, and a host of other variables. While the process of identity development is invariably challenging for adolescent girls, the girls in the study were figuring out who they were during a unique socio-political moment. As if navigating adolescence wasn't already a challenging enough task, they were doing so in the midst of a global pandemic, against escalating rates of racial tension, rising rates of Antisemitism, and in a country that was becoming increasingly polarized around issues involving immigration, gun control, transphobia, election fraud, reproductive rights, climate change, and a host of other issues. Many of these issues affected girls personally and impacted their meaning-making processes.

Discussion and Interpretation of Research Findings

In the section below, I discuss the research findings and how they relate to the research questions (RQs).

Finding 1: Religion is Important to Girls, and They Are Trying to Find Their Place Within It

Finding 1 addressed all three research questions. Some girls ($n = 7$), who were raised in Conservative and/or traditional households, were questioning the religious beliefs they were raised with and exploring new ways of thinking about the world. Other girls (*n* = 7) and a non-binary participant (*n* = 1) were interested in exploring traditional Judaism, or they were raised in homes where it was practiced. They experienced challenges because their beliefs about gender conflicted with the patriarchal structure of traditional Judaism (subfindings 1.1-1.2). Overarching concerns included:

- Girls used to believe in God; they were confused about what to believe, particularly as they were encountering new ways of experiencing the world
- Seven girls expressed interest in participating in traditional prayer spaces; they felt excluded from them because they wanted the same privileges and responsibilities
- A girl who identified as non-binary wanted to participate in traditional egalitarian prayer spaces

The findings indicated that some girls were wrestling with their religious identities. As they moved from childhood to adolescence, they were trying to figure out which aspects of Judaism made sense to them, such as where to place their faith, whether the stories they heard as children were true, and whether God existed. Fowler (1981, 1991) claims that these questions are developmentally appropriate for adolescents. “Capable of using and appreciating abstract concepts, young persons begin to think about their own thinking, to reflect upon their stories, and to name and synthesize their meanings” (Fowler & Dell, 2006, p. 39). Tova was trying to make sense of why she survived a life-threatening illness when so many of her friends from treatment died. As a deeply religious person, she wanted to believe that this was part of God’s plan. However, she found herself questioning her faith in God. While Fowler (1981, 1991) suggests that adolescents turn to God as an authority figure as they distance themselves from their parents, Shire (1997) sees the relationship for Jewish people differently.

Shire (1987) asserts that Jewish tradition leaves space for people to wrestle with this relationship since Jews have a *covenant*, or a partnership, with God:[102]

> At times it may be deep enough to adhere in all our heart, in all our soul, and all our might to a loving God; but at other times, we might lose sight of a relationship, and doubt it's ever existed. Both of these moments comprise our searching. (p. 25)

Tova is not alone with her questions; many Jewish teens– and adults– question their belief in God (The Jewish Education Project & Rosov Consulting, 2019; Shire, 1997; Smith & Denton, 2005). According to Smith and Denton (2005), "only 10% of Jewish teens — whose traditions may or may not put God at the center of Judaism — report [feeling very close or extremely close to God]" (p. 40).[103]

Part of the way that girls navigated this conflict depended on how they perceived their struggle in relation to their friends, families, and religious communities. When talking about God, Liana notes, "It's something that I don't completely believe in and have my full faith in, like my mom does." Liana could be comparing their relationship with God to their mother's, whom they see as a devout believer. However, Liana seems to feel constrained by their family's religious practice rather than internally conflicted over their religious beliefs. They indicate that if they had the choice, they wouldn't "be so, like, brainwashed." Liana fits neatly into the category of teens whose religious beliefs differ from their parents'. According to a 2020 study conducted by the Pew Research Center, *U.S. Teens Take After their Parents Religiously, Attend Services Together and Enjoy Family Rituals* (Pew Research Center, 2020b), while 88% of teens and parents share similar beliefs about God, 62% of teens did not believe in God when their parents did. This suggests that teens wrestle with this issue more than adults.

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[102] This covenant was made when Abraham promised to worship God in exchange for God sparing his only son, Isaac, from slaughter. Abraham promised that all his future descendants would also follow God.

[103] This was reported from the 2002-2003 NSYR.

The girls' stories and struggles are far from unique. The 2003 National Study on Youth and Religion (NSYR) showed that it was common for teens of all religions to question God's existence and/or their relationship with God.[104] While Jewish teens ranked lowest in terms of feeling close to God (Regnerus et al. 2005),[105] a study conducted by The Jewish Education Project and Rosov Consulting (2019) revealed that 64% of Jewish teens "believed in God or a Universal Spirit" (p. 23).[106] It is important to acknowledge that only two of the activist girls in the study declared themselves atheists. These views could change over time, particularly as girls encounter new events, people, and experiences. It is also important to note that the girls' beliefs about God and some of the issues they were struggling with were likely influenced by their religious upbringing. For example, Orthodoxy tends to be more God-centered than other branches of Judaism. Several other girls in the study expressed an uncomplicated view of God, which indicated that they either did not believe in God and were not concerned about it or that they accepted God. Laila, for example, feels that "[Judaism] is not about believing in God, or knowing all the Hebrew, or knowing every single verse in the Torah. It's about knowing the core beliefs and values of Judaism and accepting that."

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[104] The survey revealed that while overall, 84% of American teens believe in God, their understandings of God vary based on their religious inclinations.

[105] Black Protestants ranked the highest at feeling close to God at 49%, and Jews ranked the lowest at 10%.

[106] This research was conducted among Jewish teens who participated in youth serving organizations, so the rates of Jewish teens surveyed who believe in God could be higher than the population of Jewish teens outside this population.

One other factor that could have precipitated the girls' questioning is the fact that they were critically engaging with the world around them. They were asking difficult questions, and they wanted answers. For example, Taylor wanted to know where her prayers were going and if they meant anything. She was looking for "a closeness to God and a sense of God's presence" (Shire, 1997, p. 56). The girls' struggles indicate the need for further inquiry in this field. The literature on faith development in Jewish teens is scant, and that which exists fails to examine it from a gender-based perspective (see Kress, 2013; Shire, 1987, 1997, 2013; Smith & Denton, 2005). The extant literature primarily examines stages of faith development and best practices for educators to promote spiritual identity development in teens. The literature could be extended by exploring what faith means to Jewish girls and how it extends to their justice work.

Girls' questions and struggles about religion extended beyond their spiritual beliefs. Seven girls, all of whom were raised in modern Orthodox or Conservative families, were wrestling with gender-related issues in traditional Judaism and figuring out how to navigate their religious practices around them (Heschel, 1991; Plaskow, 1990; Siegel, 1997). A primary concern expressed among girls was women's perceived "inequality" in Orthodox Judaism, a term they used to describe women's status compared to men's. They were trying to find a religious identity that was right for them, a common issue experienced by many adolescents (Smith & Denton, 2005). While some girls were raised in the tradition and wanted to change it to advance opportunities for women's and girls' participation, others were considering whether to choose this identity for themselves. Each girl managed what I refer to as the intersection between her feminist and her religious identities differently.[107] To a certain extent, their approaches were informed by their insider/outsider status– whether they were born into Orthodoxy or were experimenting with it (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

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[107] Twenty-nine out of 30 girls identified as feminists in the Google survey.

The girls self-identified as feminists because they objected to patriarchal structures in Orthodox Judaism, as other women and allies have done and are currently doing (see Fisher, 2016; Heschel, 1992; Siegel, 1991). They cited specific areas of conflict, such as women's and girls' inability to read the torah, and their exclusion from being counted in *minyanim* (the minimum number of men required [10] for certain religious ceremonies to take place).[108] A few girls, including Sivan, Alexandra, and Taylor, indicated that while the spiritual aspects of Orthodoxy appealed to them, they would need to give up their agency to adhere to this identity. This way of being contradicts their expectations of how girls and women should be in the world. This brings to light an interesting discussion of how girls, many of whom have been raised in what Harris (2004) refers to as a post-feminist society where gender equality has been achieved, navigate patriarchal contexts such as Orthodoxy, where men hold the majority of power in both secular and religious life (Kaufman, 1989). While the tradition has been open to change, in many communities, the distinction between men and women remains clear.

The girls' narratives stand in contrast to recent literature that shows rising rates of Orthodoxy among young people (Pew Research Center, 2020a). Their concerns highlight the tensions that girls feel who crave the presence of tradition and spirituality in their lives but do not want to concede their power as women to carve out a meaningful religious identity. While groundbreaking and important scholarship has been written by Orthodox feminists (see, for example, Greenberg, 1992), Sivan did not want to "fight" for her status within Orthodoxy. She acknowledges that while there are "a lot of awesome modern Orthodox feminists who completely challenged the stereotype, that is not what Orthodox is on the ground."

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[108] While in some communities, girls and women are allowed to participate in these *mitzvot*, some girls have experienced these issues globally. It could also be because girls were committed to the larger cause of standing for women's equality.

Whereas Sivan was able to reach a conclusion, Taylor is struggling. She prefers the Orthodox style of prayer but dislikes women's second-class status:

> I'm going to stay Conservative; I think I like the Orthodox way of praying. It's a step back, you know, because women and men are separate and women don't have the same bar mitzvahs, but I don't know, I kind of like it. But I don't like it because of that. I prefer the gender equality of Conservative, but I like the praying style of Orthodox.

Taylor's uncertainty indicates the messiness of identity construction. She feels that she has to choose between her feminist and religious identities. While traditional egalitarian communities do exist, she may be unaware of them. The larger issue is what Minnich (2005) attributes to "prejudicial exclusions" in some religions [such as Judaism] that "preach love and respect for all individuals while prescribing unequal roles and possibilities for women and/or categorically refusing full inclusion of homosexuals" (Minnich, 2005, p. 47).[109] While this is one approach to interpreting religion, Taylor did not perceive women's status as being equal to men's.

Tova approaches the intersection of her identities differently. She has lived in different communities, some of which are more progressive than others. These experiences have raised her consciousness regarding the various ways that women can deepen their participation in Orthodox Judaism. She is committed to bringing change to her community. As noted by El-Or (1997), "when [girls and] women operate within the frame of male-defined constructs, they have roughly three possibilities: they can accept and internalize male-defined practices; they can reread, deconstruct, and read again; or they can resist and reject them all together" (p. 65). By exercising her voice and agitating for change, Tova is attempting to reread concepts within Orthodoxy to make it more inclusive for women, contributing to what Greenberg (1992) refers to as a "revolution of small signs" (p. 95) for women in both religious and secular life.

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[109] I would add non-binary and gender fluid persons to this list. This book was authored in 2005, hence the anachronism.

Phoebe, who is non-binary, is also bringing an activist perspective to their Jewish practice. They shared how they were challenging ideas of normalcy in traditional Judaism by creating space for themselves to pray alongside others (Hill, 2017; Milligan, 2019). This indicates how participants like Phoebe were internalizing a progressive gender social construct and bringing it to Jewish life (Lesko, 2002). This is a fairly nascent issue that imposes new challenges and opportunities for traditional Jewish communities, particularly since many rituals and traditions follow binary-based gender practices, such as using a *mechitza*, a partition used to divide men's and women's prayer spaces (Crasnow, 2017). Phoebe's relationship with religion speaks to the ways that younger Jews are actively cultivating and growing their own Jewish identities by picking and choosing which aspects of Judaism to work into their lives (The Jewish Education Project & Rosov Consulting, 2016, 2019; Kelman et al., 2017).

One girl, Amira, expressed sentiments that differed from the other girls. She is also experimenting with Orthodoxy. She did not feel demeaned by women's position in Orthodoxy, but rather empowered by it. While Kaufman (1989) acknowledges that some women who become Orthodox by choice, also known as *ba'al teshuva*, identify as feminists, Amira did not identify this way in the Google survey. These findings speak to the complicated arrangements the girls in the study navigated to wrestle with their religious identities. It is also a reminder that their identities are fluid and can change over time. It would be interesting to know if girls who are raised in other religious contexts, such as Islam or Catholicism, experience similar questions and challenges.

Finding 2: Girls Are Making Sense of Antisemitism, Criticism Against Israel, and Navigating Their Own Personal Relationships with Israel

Finding 2 addressed all three research questions in terms of how girls navigated their relationship to voice, visibility, and representation. The findings showed that some girls experienced Antisemitism and criticism against Israel in their schools and online. They also perceived it as part of their social experience. They had to think about when and how to respond to these incidents. The girls were developing a nuanced relationship with Israel, where they were grappling with the complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (subfindings 2.1-2.2). Overarching concerns included:

- Feeling alone in the fight against Antisemitism, the girls felt that they had few allies when it came to defending their Jewish identity
- Wanting to engage in critical discourse with peers about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but feeling silenced
- Feeling that they had not been provided with a meaningful education about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Many of the girls who attended public schools experienced Antisemitism and criticism against Israel in their school environments, with limited support and protection from adults. These incidents are noteworthy for a few reasons: they impacted girls' social and emotional experiences, and also, school is where a great deal of young people's socialization occurs (AAUW, 1992; Raby, 2010). The majority of incidents were perpetrated by male peers. Bakal et al. (2015) similarly found that 44% of girls experienced Antisemitism in their schools. While no measure exists to examine incidents of Antisemitism in K–12 schools, a study conducted by Hillel International and the Anti-Defamation League (2021) found that one in three college students experienced Antisemitism, with 79% reporting repeated incidents.[110] An additional 31% witnessed an Antisemitic event on their campus that was not directed at them (Hillel International & The Anti-Defamation League, 2021).

The girls responded to these incidents in different ways. Some girls' experiences with Antisemitism served as positive builders of identity (Clark, 2000; Ward, 2000). This was the case for Daniella. While she always knew that Antisemitism existed, her consciousness was raised when she left her small day school for a large high school. She was surprised to find that her new classmates made swastikas and told jokes about Hitler. In retrospect, she realized that she had been "in this little bubble, and then I was just kind of brought into the real world." While she initially struggled in her new school environment, it also helped her to deepen her sense of Jewish identity and realize what it meant to her (Phinney, 1989). She was inspired to start a Jewish Student Union at her new school and to share her experiences with Antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment with the school committee. When her parents gave her the option to change schools to one with more Jewish students, she decided to stay at her current school, in part to continue her activist work. She shares:

> Freshman year, my parents noticed that I was struggling. It was hard; I was nervous and anxious to go to school. Thinking back on it, I feel like what I've been working towards at my school is important.

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[110] Participants in the study included 756 college students from 220 different 4-year colleges and universities in the United States.

Daniella's narrative reflects a shift in her perspective. She feels that she has evolved in her practice to stand up to Antisemitism, an indication of her "becoming" an activist and realizing her ability to effect change (Brown, 2016; Taft, 2011, 2014).

This is not to suggest that girls always felt confident or able to speak up against Antisemitism or challenge criticisms of Israel. Rather, it was quite the opposite. Some girls engaged in self-silencing to avoid judgment from their peers and also to keep their emotions in check. Dafna, who describes herself as a "fiery-tempered" individual, realized that it was best to ignore the "Antisemitic and anti-Zionist" remarks from her classmates. Gilligan (1990) observes that "on a daily basis, girls receive lessons on what they can let out and what they must keep in" (p. 270). Dafna knew that responding to her peers would only lead to increased frustration on her part. She was able to exercise self-control in a situation where she was given few options (Bent, 2016; Gonick, 2006).

While these are important examples of how Jewish girls were exercising activism in their schools, few talked about the individuals who were supporting them in this work. Brown (2016) emphasizes the importance of adults acting as allies for girl activists in order for their work to be possible. Some girls felt that the adults in their schools failed them by downplaying Antisemitism and failing to teach Israel from a nuanced perspective. This could stem from educator bias, a lack of experience, or their inability to understand Jewish girls' unique standpoint (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1994). To date, only 19 states require the Holocaust as part of their curriculum, and a recent study conducted by the Pew Research Center found that more than half of Americans were unable to recall how many people died, citing a critical need for education in this area (Karimi, 2021; Pew Research Center, 2020c). Like girls of color, whose perspectives are often overlooked by educators, administrators, and decision-makers, some girls adopted a “critical” stance to their curriculum (see Chase, 2008; Jacobs, 2017, 2020b).

Rachel was disappointed when her teacher failed to intervene after a peer said he wanted to go to Palestine. This was in response to her comment that she wanted to go to Israel. Rachel wishes that her teacher had turned the moment into a thoughtful discussion: “I wish that my teacher was educated enough to realize that, like, this is a problem, especially when there's a Jewish student. I was in shock. I was like, ‘Why is this a thing?’” While Rachel’s double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) enabled her to understand the perspectives of her classmate and her teacher, her experience was not validated by those around her. This indicates a need for training and discourse where scholars and educators can learn how to support Jewish girls in discussions around Israel, Antisemitism, and making their Jewish identities visible.

The girls also described situations where they felt attacked because of their identification with Israel. While they wanted to engage in critical discussions, they felt silenced by their peers. This deprived them of the opportunity to explain their perspective and to reach a deeper understanding. Outside of school, some girls also felt it necessary to withhold their Jewishness and their identification with Israel for fear of being attacked or judged by others. Jordana kept these identities to herself in some of the activist spaces she participated in. She was afraid that people would jump to conclusions about her if they knew. According to Antler (2018), the decades-long tension surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can make Jewish girls and women feel alienated and alone, particularly when there are few partners who are committed to listening.

Beck’s (1988) discussion of Jewish women’s reluctance to bring Jewish issues into feminist discourse also applies to how some girls felt about sharing their Jewish identity and their identification with Israel in potentially hostile spaces:

> There is the fear of attack that produces a protective silence; second, is the fear of being perceived as too "demanding," "pushy," or "politically incorrect." Third, and possibly more than any other factor, the fear of being excluded keeps women silent. (p. 96)

As a result, some of the girls in the study only brought parts of themselves to their activism.

Alternatively, many girls in the study participated in online activism (Stornaiuolo & Thomas, 2017). They used multiple platforms, such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, to share information, exercise their voices, and access knowledge. While social media provided girls with the ability to say things that they would not feel permitted to say in public, it also made them vulnerable when they received hatred from trolls. Maayan was traumatized by the “Nazis” she encountered on Instagram and chose to deactivate her account. As noted by Givetash (2019), this is an all-too-common experience for girl and women activists. She observes “a pervasive culture of mockery and abuse… [that is] often manifested in attacks on women and girl [activists]” (para. 20). This example is reflective of a growing body of literature on the damaging effects of social media on young people, including ways that are psychologically damaging (Love & Bradley, 2014). However, given the overall lack of visibility and unknown experiences of Jewish girl activists, there were few people or places to whom they could turn to share and process their experiences.

Chloe, on the other hand, felt upset when her friends did not “like” her posts about Antisemitism and Israel. “It definitely offends me, especially on social media. It's definitely hurtful when you know someone that's passionate about that issue and close to it, and you don't say anything about it." Chloe could interpret her friends' behavior as a rejection of their friendship, particularly since many activist girls see their activism as an extension of their identity (Taft, 2011). This speaks to her need for relational connection and validation that her activism is important (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Taft, 2011). Conversely, some activists interpret "likes" as a measure of "performative activism," where people know little about the causes they stand for and use them to promote their own self-image (Wellman, 2022).[111] Alternatively, Chloe's friends could also want to distance themselves from Antisemitism for fear of being identified as sympathetic to Jews and Israel.

Many girls were also struggling to integrate their newfound knowledge about Israel. A general critique was that Jewish educators failed to provide them with a nuanced understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a critique expressed by other Jewish teens who are educated in mainstream Jewish institutions, such as day schools and synagogue programs (The Jewish Education Project and Rosov Consulting, 2016; Rosov Consulting, 2018; Zakai, 2022). Rabbi Jill Jacobs (2021) concurs. She feels that most Jewish educational programs shy away from the complicated aspects of Israel. Young people are unprepared to grapple with its complexity. In her opinion, Jewish teens and children receive a lot of "substance-less Israel education…nobody tells them anything, and then they're not actually prepared when they get to college and hear the hard stuff" (Jacobs, 2021, para. 40). A few girls described specific efforts they were undertaking to become more knowledgeable about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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[111] A prime example of this occurred on #BlackoutTuesday, when White people centered themselves in the Black Lives Matter movement by posting Black squares on Instagram rather than hold themselves accountable for benefiting from the successes of Black people in the music industry (Wellman, 2022). This perpetuated harm in the Black community since White people failed to show understanding of the issue.

The girls overwhelmingly expressed a desire for peace with Palestinians, reflecting a widely held viewpoint among peers of their generation “that Israeli government policies regarding Palestinians are fundamentally antithetical to liberal values” (Waxman, 2017, p. 186). All of the girls in the sample identified as having a positive relationship with Israel– that is, they were not anti-Zionist. Many girls were quick to distinguish their relationship with Israel from the actions of its government. According to Waxman (2017), “critical engagement with Israel is a manifestation of attachment, not alienation” (p. 181). While girls felt that their Jewishness gave them permission to critique the actions of the government, they expressed difficulty navigating conversations with anti-Zionists, particularly when these conversations became Antisemitic. This reinforces the need for girls to have opportunities where they can develop language and literacy around the political situation in Israel and define their own relationship with Israel and Palestine. One particular area where some girls struggled was regarding their relationship with Black Lives Matter. While many girls identified with the movement, others were concerned about the purported Antisemitism within it (Meyers, 2021). Mia attended a BLM rally where participants cheered, “From the river to the sea!” and she didn’t know what to do. While she cared about BLM, she also cared about Israel. Ariella, on the other hand, took a systemic approach to these issues and attributed them to White supremacy. These issues extend beyond the girls and indicate the need to include Jewish girls in intersectionality discourse since they should not have to “choose” between sides, particularly when some of the girls in the sample straddled both of them (Brettschneider, 2016; Burton, 2019).

Finding 3: Girls Are Thinking about What It Means to Navigate the World as an Identified Jew

Finding 3 addressed all three research questions. The girls discussed the thoughts, challenges, and considerations they took into account when it came to showing signs and symbols of their Jewish identity. They also spoke about whether there was a quintessential "Jewish look" or way of being Jewish, and what it meant to be assigned to this identity or excluded from it (subfindings 3.1-31e.). Overarching concerns included:

- Wearing Jewish signs and symbols could threaten their safety
- Making decisions about when and where to show signs and symbols to confer Jewishness
- Thinking about what it meant to qualify as a Jew

A salient theme that emerged was how girls felt about showing markers of their Jewish identity across the different spaces they occupied. Some of these markers included wearing jewelry with Jewish symbols, such as a *Magen David* or a Star of David, clothing with Hebrew letters or logos from Jewish summer camps or youth groups, and wearing religious wear such as a *kippah*. The girls recognized these symbols as important signs of their "tribal affiliation," but also knew that they could make them vulnerable to attack (The Jewish Education Project & Rosov Consulting, 2016). These symbols could signify their sense of belonging in a Jewish space and denote religiosity, yet also render them unsafe in others. While girls were making their own decisions about what was right for them, they were also filtering messages from friends, news sources, and family members about when and where it was safe to show their identities. The girls' and their parents' concerns were not unwarranted. According to the Pew Research Center (2020a), 53% of Jews report feeling less safe than they did five years ago, with perception rates higher among affiliated Jews (58%) than unaffiliated Jews (38%). The girls in the sample fell into a few different categories: those who were defiant and who chose to show signs and symbols of their Jewish identity, those who chose to conceal signs and symbols of their Jewish identity, and those who were confused. Girls who received messages from family members telling them to hide signs and symbols of their Judaism were frustrated that they should have to hide such a fundamental aspect of themselves. Rather, they felt it was important to show people that they were proud of this identity. Alaina received a special *Magen David* necklace for her Bat Mitzvah and was excited to wear it. Her mother, who experienced Antisemitism in America and Ukraine, was reluctant to let her wear it.

> My mom said, 'Wear it under your shirt because you're going to get attacked.' And I was like, 'I know I should probably care about like, getting hurt and stuff, but I'm not going to do that, I'm just going to wear it and, like, what happens will happen. I'm not going to hide who I am.' And that kind of like, drives me to do a lot of the things that I'm passionate about.

Alaina understands the risks involved in wearing a symbol of her Judaism. She wants to show the world that she is Jewish regardless, or perhaps in spite of them. This is one example of how girls used their bodies as sites of resistance by showing their Jewish pride (Hess, 2014; Hill, 2017). The girls may have been aware of the fact that the *Magen David* was regarded as a contested symbol at the 2017 Dyke March when some marchers conflated it with the Israeli flag.

Olivia views her jewelry as an important representation of her Jewish identity. While she has never experienced Antisemitism, she thinks of her jewelry as an important way of identifying herself and also as a way to educate her non-Jewish peers about her religion and culture (Brown, 2009). Her rings also remind her of her own self-evolution, since she did not always feel comfortable sharing her Jewish identity with others (Brown, 2009; Phinney, 1993).

> I have multiple rings. One of them says *shema*,[112] one of them's a *hamsa.* I have multiple things that represent my Judaism. And when people ask me questions, I'm like, 'Oh, it's a Hebrew prayer. I'm Jewish.' And they're like, 'Oh, okay.' And if they ask me questions, I explain it to them. If people have questions, I answer them and I feel proud. Being Jewish has truly shaped who I am, so I'm not going to hide it. I'm not going to be nervous about going out in public with something that represents my Judaism.

Some girls felt the need to hide their Jewish identity due to concerns about Antisemitism. Alexandra went to great lengths to hide hers when she traveled abroad, a decision made by her parents to which she happily obliged. This could be regarded as a form of internalized Antisemitism, where she rejected her Jewish identity or associated it with negativity (Clark, 2000; Gilman, 1986). Gold (2012) reports that "some [girls] respond to Antisemitic experiences by trying to hide their Jewishness" (p. 551). However, Alexandra's behavior revealed a more complicated picture since it was context specific. She identifies as Jewish in other aspects of her life, and she is heavily involved in Zionist activism. This demonstrates how Jewish girls relate to their Jewish identity in different ways, depending on their perceived feelings of safety.

Like Alexandra, some of the girls who were the most outspoken about their Jewish identity and Israel were also the most worried about incidents of Antisemitism. While Chloe felt comfortable in her known surroundings, she felt the need to be hypervigilant when she left her known community. For example, she considered removing her *chai* necklace for fear of being identified as a Jew. This suggests that girls who were more deeply engaged with these issues were more concerned about them. This mirrors findings by Wright et al. (2021), who examined college students' perceptions of Antisemitism. One of their key findings was that while incidents of Antisemitism have not substantially increased, students' perceptions of them have. To this point, a recent study among Jewish fraternity and sorority students from 250 colleges revealed that half of students felt the need to hide their Jewish identity (Cohen Research Group, 2021). Moreover, this need increased over time, i.e., from freshman to senior year, due to purported Antisemitism (Cohen Research Group, 2021).[113]

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[112] The Hebrew prayer to hear or listen to God.

A few girls expressed concern when it came to applying to college. They were worried about the presence of Antisemitic and anti-Israel activity on college campuses (Bakal et al., 2015). They were fearful that they would be rejected from certain colleges if they shared their Jewish identity and activities. Jordana wondered if being a Jew and caring about Israel was a good or bad thing. This reflects the struggles Jewish girls experienced regarding the need to hold back certain aspects of their identities.

The other concept the girls were evaluating was what it meant to *look* Jewish and to be *considered* Jewish by others (Glenn, 2010; Prell, 1999). There were multiple layers to these questions; how girls defined them for themselves: how other Jews defined them (and which Jews) and how non-Jews defined them. The girls debated whether there was a "typical" Jewish look or way of being Jewish. Their judgments were based on dominant stereotypes and *halakhic* definitions of what it meant to be considered a Jew. They discussed how these views could exclude some populations of Jews and provide others with a sense of belonging (Brettschneider, 2016; Burton, 2019; Robins, 2019). The girls expressed confusion, discomfort, and frustration at the idea of labeling themselves or being labeled by others (Gilligan, 2019; Robins, 2019). This section mainly focuses on White girls, since girls of color are discussed in the next finding.

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[113] Three hundred seventeen (317) students were surveyed in this study.

A few girls had been told by other people that they “looked” Jewish. They came to the general conclusion that the “typical” Jewish look consisted of dark curly hair and “bigger” noses (their term, not mine). Samantha has been told that she looks Jewish. She is trying to figure out what this means:

> I know I am White; it is very obvious I'm White. I'm very pale. But people can tell I'm Jewish by the way I look. I don't know what that means, but I get told I look Jewish all the time. A lot of my other friends, if they have curly hair, people will go like, ‘You have a big nose, are you Jewish?’ What the hell is that? But when you go around saying, ‘Oh, you look Jewish.’ Is that supposed to be a good thing? I don't know what that means. I want to look like myself, I don't want to look like a big group of people who are associated by religion. I didn't even realize that was a thing. Like, I’ve never been told I looked like a Jew until like a year ago.

Samantha is trying to understand how her friends are jumping to conclusions about her identity based on her appearance (Hill, 2017). While her friends’ comments seem developmentally appropriate since it is normal for teens to differentiate themselves from one another and look for categories of belonging, her narrative suggests that it makes her uncomfortable, particularly since she wants to decide her own identity (Tatum, 1997). Moreover, Samantha seems surprised and bothered by her friends’ reductionist thinking.

Some girls who fell into this category were concerned that their appearances “marked” them and placed them at an increased risk of being targeted by White supremacists and neo-Nazis, particularly given the resurgence of Antisemitism in America (see Sarna, 2022). Rachel’s awareness of what it meant to look Jewish was informed by her family's experience in the Holocaust. Her great-grandparents' blond hair and blue eyes allowed them to evade capture from the Nazis in Hungary. However, this experience also made her aware of the dangers of "looking" Jewish. Conversely, Rachel recognized the privilege granted to her as a White Jew in America. She knew that no one would ever question the legitimacy of her Jewishness since she "looked" stereotypically Jewish.[114] She also expressed concern that constructions of typicality excluded non-White Jews' experiences.

The girls also shared their opinions on whether there was a "typical" way of being Jewish. Some girls' understanding of this issue was grounded in dominant stereotypes that emphasized Jews' financial success and intellect. These messages were reinforced through friends, family, and the media (Brodkin, 1998; Prell, 1999). Alexandra thinks that there is some truth behind the idea that Jews control the banks and the media. She views this stereotype, which is often used to inflame Antisemitism, through a positive lens (Prell, 1999; Sarna, 2020). She thinks that there is an element of truth to them since they reinforce Jews' intellect and talent:

> There are a lot of Jewish billionaires… There are a lot of Jewish Nobel laureates. Like, we're just pretty awesome. My friends and I have conversations. Like, Jews kind of do control the banks and the media. But like, we're not Jewish supremacists by any means, but I mean, I think that, like, there are things to be proud of.

It is unclear whether she attributes Jewish success to the privileges and opportunities afforded to [White] Jews as a result of "Whitening," a process that remained elusive for members of other minority groups when Jews gained access to the GI Bill in the 1940s (Brodkin, 1998).[115] Alexandra may view Jewish oppression as her primary cause, which could limit her ability to see how Jews are privileged in ways that other groups are not (Crenshaw, 1991; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

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[114] In this article, McIntosh discusses the benefits that are automatically conferred on her as a White person. For example, standard bandaids always come in her skin color, she is never followed when she goes into a store, police always want to help her, and she is assumed to be a "good" person because she is White.

Participants whose parents intermarried or whose parents converted to Judaism described how Jewish peers questioned the legitimacy of their Jewishness and made them feel othered. This is due to the fact that both Conservative and Orthodox Judaism have a *halakhic* measure of Jewishness that is matrilineal (Cohen, 1985). Daniella was called a "muggle" by her day school peers, a pejorative and fictional term developed by J. K. Rowling to describe non-wizards in her *Harry Potter* book series. This hurt her deeply. Phoebe's peers did not consider them "real" Jews because they did not have a B'Mitzvah. Kids can also be cruel as they navigate their own sense of identity, which involves a sorting process of insiders and outsiders (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). But the wider issue is that Jewishness is a contested category with no universally agreed-upon definition of who belongs and who doesn't (Cohen & Eisen, 2000; McGinity, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2020a).

Finding 4: Jewish Girls Are Making Sense of Their Intersectional Identities and Understanding Their Unique Experiences

Finding 4 addressed all three research questions. The girls were thinking about their intersectional identities and their identity-making processes. This included their identities around race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, and religion. As they thought about these different identities, they were making sense of their salience in their lives and how they interacted with one another (subfindings 4-4:4e): Key themes included:

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[115] Receiving the GI Bill enabled White Jews to access university education and housing loans (Brettschneider, 2006; Brodkin, 1989; Prell, 1999). This rendered them "off-White" and helped them gain upward financial mobility, a privilege denied to other members of minority groups (Antler, 2018; Brodkin, 1989; Prell, 1999).

- Making sense of how racial/ethnic identity intersects with Jewish identity
- Understanding what it means to navigate the world as a gendered individual
- Balancing multiple identities

This finding examines how the Jewish activist girls in the study were making sense of their multiple identities in Jewish and non-Jewish spaces (Gergen, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). It illustrates the complexity of girls' meaning-making processes.

Jewish girls of color demonstrated positive feelings about their racial identity and their Jewish identity. They did, however, they describe moments of struggle when it came to integrating these identities in Jewish spaces, particularly when among few other Jews of Color (Belzer et al., 2021). In some cases, they were the only Jew of Color in their community. The girls described moments where they felt judged and as if they had to justify their claim to Jewishness– a condition that was not required of White Jews (Belzer et al., 2021). According to the girls, they felt White people denied them the authenticity of their own experiences and committed microaggressions against them by questioning the authenticity of their Jewish identity or treating them like guests rather than members of their own communities (Belzer et al., 2021).

Emma was playing Spanish music at a youth group meeting when her White peers told her to turn her music off rather than express curiosity or interest in it. This made Emma feel problematized; she shared, "Like if I'm doing something that has to do with my culture, like I'm always the problem and it's never the other people, which is just like it's completely backwards." While she developed a powerful counter-narrative to her peers' responses, she felt powerless in the situation and relented. Emma felt like “they just kind of pushed me away from, like, really like, opening up about how I identify ethnically.” Emma feels like she exists in two separate worlds. She has her Hispanic friends at school and her White Jewish friends at her synagogue. This makes it difficult for her to achieve an integrated sense of identity, particularly when most of her Hispanic peers have Hispanic parents (Phinney, 1993). According to Belzer et al. (2021), Jews of Color can feel like “outsider[s] on the inside” (p. 10) of Jewish communities, especially if they lack of allyship from those around them.

Maayan, Miriam, and Yael shared how they felt the need to perform and/or conform to meet the White-centered standards of their Jewish institutions by changing their mannerisms, their dress, and their behavior (Brodsky et al., 2018; Morris, 2016). Whether or not White synagogue-goers were aware of the “invisible” White dominant culture, the girls felt it and internalized it (McIntosh, 2003). It was important to them to tone down their “racial” and “ethnic” looks when entering Jewish spaces (Yancy, 2016). For example, Yael makes sure to conceal her breasts when she goes to synagogue because she worries that they will sexualize her (Raby, 2010):

> I think the other thing that comes up is like, not to be like crass, but boobs like, that's a huge thing. I feel like, especially with like in the context of like, synagogue. It's like everything’s spilling everywhere. It’s like never a button shirt, never something like, below the collarbone, God forbid, you know. I can't put on a jacket. They don’t just go away. Like, they're there. They're noticeable, like heaven forbid. I think girls who are ethnic tend to be top heavy.

It is noteworthy that Miriam, who also has Hispanic heritage, shares similar concerns about betraying standards of modesty due to her curvy body. This reveals a troubling pattern in how

Jewish girls of color dress coded themselves to conform to perceived norms of virtuosity and normalcy in White-centered Jewish institutions (Brodsky et al., 2018; Pomerantz, 2007). As Maayan pointed out, they had to work harder to prove themselves than White girls. In her study of Black girls in elite private schools, an environment in which girls of color may not necessarily feel a sense of "belonging," Jacobs (2020b) observed how girls felt the need to "leave aspects of their identity (particularly those connected with race) behind when they entered the doors of their school" (p. 76), which contributed to their outsider status.

Some girls were able to show resilience and resist the challenges before them through their actions and their words, and by also educating others about their experiences (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016; Ward, 2000). This was demonstrated by Camila's decision to speak up with her synagogue peers so they could understand what it is like for her to navigate the world as a Jew of Color. However, Jewish institutions should hire professionals to do the educating rather than look to girls, who are still working on their own identities and who also require protection, to do the heavy lifting (Bent, 2016). This indicates a need for Jewish educators and people who work with teens to become better equipped to understand the struggles and strengths experienced by Jewish girls of color. While many girls indicated that they felt supported by their Jewish communities, they also felt underserved and hurt by people who were affiliated with them. These contradictions are notable, as they reveal the complexities Jewish girls of color must contend with as they navigate issues around visibility and belonging in Jewish spaces, particularly when few educators are equipped to help them navigate these situations (Belzer et al., 2021).

Girls who were White were also thinking about the ways that Whiteness intersected with their Jewish identity. For example, in the survey question, "What is/are your ethnic identity/identities?" Samantha wrote "Jewish." Noa wrote, "Ashkenazi Jew with roots in

Lithuania, Egypt, and general Eastern Europe." Phoebe wrote "White Jew." Finally, Daniella wrote, "If being Jewish is considered an ethnicity, I would identify with that. Otherwise, I am Italian/White." This implies that the girls *saw* themselves as Jewish and White. These were the primary lenses through which they navigated the world. It reflects the ways in which Beck (1983) and Kaye/Kantrowitz (1991) defined Jewish experience, who advocated for the inclusion of Jewishness as an identity category in Women's Studies research, given the importance of this identity in the lives of many White Jewish women. The participants' statements suggest that they too saw their Jewish identities as an intrinsic part of their identity. Girls were not denying their Whiteness, but rather emphasizing the importance of their Jewish identity (Beck, 1983; Sneed et al., 2006).

Each girl bore a different relationship to Whiteness and her own understanding of what this identity entailed. While most girls felt that they enjoyed certain privileges because of it, they felt that it was an incomplete identity because being Jewish also made them vulnerable to Antisemitism and negative rhetoric against Israel. Branfman (2019) notes that "tensions around Israel and Palestine impact more than discussions of that region: these tensions limit progressive analyses of Jewishness and anti-Semitism in *any* context" (p. 130). Gilligan (2019) alludes to in her report, *Discord in the Ranks: The Women's March and the Jewish Question*, about the position of White Jewish women in the 2019 National Women's March. Gilligan (2019) notes that:

> [To] be White and Jewish is to occupy a space that belies a rhetoric resting on stark divisions between victims and perpetrators and privileging the former while vilifying and excluding the latter. The very fact that I occupy both sides of this equation pushes for a more complex understanding of the boundaries between victimhood and oppression (and

> more troubling, of how the former can shift into the latter) than some branches of left-wing discourse on anti-racism allow. (p. 14)

Gilligan’s statement calls attention to the struggle articulated by many girls in the study who wished to have their vulnerability acknowledged. This was particularly complicated for girls who wanted to participate in far-left spaces. They felt excluded because some activists dismissed Antisemitism and called for the destruction of Israel, issues that girls were closely tied to (Branfman, 2019; Brahm, 2019). They felt as though they were seen through a double standard; they were “sometimes” read as White and privileged, and other times as Israeli nationalists, but never as Jewish and victimized (Branfman, 2019; Robins, 2019). Noa feels that Whiteness does not capture the entirety of her identity since it conceals her Jewishness. She feels that “it's difficult to be a Jewish girl. It's even more difficult to be a Jewish girl in activist spaces, especially far left spaces that tend to be really staunchly anti-Israel and, as an extension, can sometimes be really Antisemitic.” She would like people to recognize the complexity of her experience. This speaks to the unique predicament that White Jewish girl activists experience to feel understood.

A few girls lost family members in the Holocaust or were related to survivors. It was difficult for them to see themselves as White when they were seen as non-White by the Nazis. Their feelings of otherness were reinforced through this enduring legacy (Gilligan, 2019). Simone, whose parents and grandparents left Russia due to religious persecution, grew up with Russian as her first language. She spent her formative years learning how to be an American and then learning to become a Jew. While she understands that people see her as White, she identifies through a cultural rather than a racial lens (Kaye/Kantrowitz, 1991). For Simone, the intersection of her Russian and Jewish identities makes it difficult for her to see herself as White

(Brettshneider, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989). While this is a label conferred on her by others, it does not define her own experience.

The girls were also examining their racial and ethnic identities. Half of the girls in the study (*n* = 16) identified as having non-White racial identity or multiethnic heritage. Within this group, eight girls expressed interest in exploring these identities (Gergen, 1991; Phinney, 1993; Tatum, 1997). As noted by Phinney (1993) and Umaña-Taylor et al. (2014), adolescence is a critical time for ethnic-racial identity (ERI) exploration. However, some girls worried that their "non-ethnic" looks could be off-putting or that they were missing critical language skills or cultural knowledge to fit in with their racial or cultural group. Some girls felt that their Jewish identity had been privileged over other identities. Other girls were not interested in exploring these identities or felt that they had the right balance in place.

Claudia's mother's family has Latinx heritage. As Claudia grew older, she wanted to engage more deeply with it. However, she felt that her options were limited. She did not speak Spanish, and she was bullied by her Latinx classmates in middle school because she was not a "real Latina." Claudia found a comfortable space to examine her identity in high school. She participated in a mixed-heritage group and took courses in Latin American literature. She now feels that she has achieved an "integrated" sense of identity as a Latinx Jew (Phinney, 1989, 1993). She claims, "There is a connection between both of these identities." I don't feel like I've traditionally had that."

Whereas Claudia has achieved a comfortable self-definition, Anna is trying to figure out where to place herself with regard to her Cuban identity. When Anna tells people she is Cuban, they usually tell her that she can't be because she is Jewish and White. She feels like this is an affront to her identity.

> I've told people I'm Cuban and like they'll go, 'Oh no you can't be Cuban, you're Jewish. You can't be.' Like, they try to explain my own family history, which is just very irritating and stuff. But it's just this odd feeling. Like whatever I do, I'm like, disrespecting someone. I'm always going back and forth about how I should define myself.

Anna wants to be able to access her Cuban heritage in a way that is meaningful to her but does not offend People of Color. This suggests that she feels constrained by socially constructed definitions of race and belonging (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Phinney, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Anna's concern about other people's perceptions of her makes it difficult for her to define her own experience.

Some girls with multiracial or multiethnic identities felt safest in Jewish spaces. This was the case with Olivia, who is biracial. This could stem from the fact that she did not have access to peers who shared a similar identity to hers, which is critical for ethnic-racial identity exploration (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). When a teacher encouraged her to join an affinity group for Black students, Olivia felt that the students looked down on her because she was "too White." She also felt that she was "too Black" for the White community. Olivia feels that the Jewish communities she is a part of accept her for who she is. At the same time, she also spoke about her experiences with racism in the Jewish community, which underscores the messiness of girls' identity-making processes.

The girls were also examining gender constructs and thinking about what it meant to navigate the world as gendered individuals (Butler, 1990; Lipkin, 2009). They spoke about ways that their gender could make people perceive them in ways that were limiting and objectifying (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). A few girls shared experiences when people attempted violence against them or violated their feelings of safety (Greenberg & Barton, 2017). Yael was humiliated to realize that someone had taken a photo of her on their phone and written "Thick Jew" on it. The person circulated it around the school. While her peers found the incident to be funny, Yael was made to feel uncomfortable and violated. In a situation like this, it was hard to know who was in the joke and who wasn't. This speaks to the triple marginalization experienced by Jewish girls of color and also how social media can have a ripple effect on the ways in which girls are sexualized and objectified (Brettschneider, 2016; Cooper et al., 2021; Crenshaw, 1991).

The girls also discussed how they perceived the purported culture of sexual objectification, hook-up culture, and sexual harassment in Jewish youth spaces (Dreyfus, 2018, 2019; Mahrer, 2021). Miriam wanted to participate in a youth group. However, she decided against it because she was turned off by its purported "hook-up" culture (Mahrer, 2021; Shire, 2012). This suggests that girls were feeling pressure to be sexual or concede to heteronormative norms. Conversely, they weren't interested in participating in a culture that prioritized those values. Maayan attended a Jewish summer camp and was bothered by the way that many of the girls would "compete against each other to get boys' attention. It was not fun to be around at all." Some girls felt it necessary to withdraw their participation to avoid this treatment, and others were engaging in activism to shift the culture around these issues.

The girls also shared how they felt about their bodies and what it meant to be in them (Hill, 2017). During one of the White focus groups, a few girls discussed the topic of body image. I did not ask them about this topic during the interviews. Simone, who struggled with "Russian" expectations of thinness, channeled her activism into promoting body positivity among younger girls. This prompted a lively and honest discussion among other participants, which indicated that they wanted to talk about it. A few other girls shared that they struggled to find bodily acceptance (Steiner-Adair, 2006). Jordana described how her experience with early puberty made her feel ashamed of her body and how she felt awkward next to all of her “small and graceful” peers (Mazzarella, 2010a). Like Simone, she was able to channel her feelings of disempowerment into a form of feminist activism by forming an organization to collect menstrual supplies for girls and women in developing countries (Brown, 2016). More than that, this conversation was a testament to the relational connections between girls and their ability to assume leadership and construct knowledge that reflected their lives and their experiences (Jordan, 2005; Rutstein-Riley & Ziergiebel, 2018, 2020). Girls’ activism was also informed by the mentoring relationships they had with adults in their lives (Piran & Ross, 2005; Rutstein-Riley & Ziergiebel, 2018). Ella was drawn into feminism by a counselor at her Jewish summer camp. She was inspired to start her own feminist group with a friend.

Finding 5: Jewish Girls Need Connection and Support

Finding 5 addressed all three research questions. Girls discussed points of connection and disconnection in their Jewish and non-Jewish communities. They spoke about specific struggles they faced with regard to mental health issues and uncertainty about the future. They shared how they were responding to these issues (subfindings 5-5.2a). The most salient themes included:

- Wanting to feel a sense of belonging
- Struggling with mental health issues and feeling empowered to talk about them
- Feeling uncertain about the future

The girls were no different from other girls when they discussed being hurt by peers and wanting to fit in. This extended to Jewish and non-Jewish spaces. Liana felt that peers at their former day school bullied them because they were threatened by their outspokenness and their nonconformity. They recall, “It was all about strategic days. Like on Shabbat they wore pretty dresses but then, like our normal days, they wear black miniskirts." They observed that by "trying to be different, they're being exactly the same." Liana had no interest in participating, nor were they invited to. In fact, Liana's classmates teased them for being queer, and they used to make "gay" jokes to upset them. As noted by Taft (2011), some girl activists have difficulty fitting in with their peers because they are not interested in "typical" teen things, like going to the movies or hanging out at malls. Rather than problematizing themselves, Liana attributed their classmates' behavior as a rejection of their confidence, maturity, and authenticity (Taft, 2022).

These experiences are not unique to Jewish communities (see AAUW, 2011; NWLC, 2019). However, it is important to name them since they negatively impacted the experiences of girls in the study. While it is unclear if Liana experienced bullying, its pervasiveness in Jewish institutions was first identified as a pressing issue by Epstein et al. (2007) more than 15 years ago. They urged Jewish institutions to invest in training, support, and programs to help all students and participants feel included. Since then, few resources indicate that Jewish institutions responded to this call (see Jacobs, 2012; Novick, 2011). Issues such as these are typically addressed in a reactionary way.[116] On the other hand, Jewish teens– or any teens, for that matter– are not always nice or easy to get along with. While Liana or their peers could have challenging personalities, the school had a duty to protect them.

The girls also shared experiences where they felt held and supported by peers in Jewish youth environments (Jordan, 2005; Jordan et al., 1991). They described their relationships as "different" from those of their friends in high school, where people could be competitive and judgmental. They also indicated that they liked having a shared religion and culture to draw from (Phinney, 1993; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). It could also relate to the informal context of these environments. The Jewish Education Project and Rosov Consulting (2016) also found these themes in their research with 139 teens from Atlanta, Boston, Denver, and Los Angeles. They note:

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[116] This was the case with #metoo in the Jewish community (Dreyfus, 2018). It took a scandal for the Jewish community to pay attention. That said, Jewish communal institutions are no different than any other institutions.

> The teens often also described their Jewish friendships as somehow different than friendships they had with their non-Jewish friends. It often was difficult for them to articulate why this was the case. Some teens said they liked not having to explain things (e.g., why they couldn’t go out on Friday night or eat certain foods) to their non-Jewish peers. Others said that these Jewish friendships were somehow deeper or more meaningful than the connections with their non-Jewish friends. It is important to note the possibility that the settings in which Jewish friendships were formed (e.g., Jewish summer camp)—rather than the Jewish elements of the relationships—may have resulted in such deep connectedness. (p. 9)

Simone, who began attending Jewish overnight camp two summers ago, describes her camp friends as her “best friends. We talk every night.”

Friends provided the girls with an important buffer against other stressors in their lives. Some girls spoke openly about their mental health issues. They talked about the struggles they faced and the ongoing efforts they engaged in to safeguard their mental health. They possessed a certain level of fluency when it came to discussing these issues, which indicated that it was a normalized part of their lives (Wills et al., 2020). Similar to the girls’ narratives on body image, they spoke about how they “managed” these issues and how they were “helping others” by destigmatizing these issues (Wills et al., 2020). Ella, who struggles with anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder, is involved in a mental health club at her school, and Samantha, who struggles with anxiety and depression, feels that it is important to talk about it. She explains, “I’ve become a big activist for breaking the stigma. I didn’t like talking about it before, and then I realized that I should talk about it because everybody has these problems and it's very important to talk about it.”

In this way, the girls were reframing these challenges (Ward, 2002). They were also making themselves vulnerable by discussing their mental health with others (Hill, 2017; Wills et al., 2020). It is important to note that the girls who were engaged in this work were White. This could have been coincidental. It could also reflect larger trends that indicate that White girls have an easier time accessing mental health care and speaking about it since they are given permission when vulnerable, while girls of color are not (Cauffman et al., 2005; United States Department of Education, n.d.).

In addition to managing their mental health, the girls also expressed uncertainty about the future. They thought that they needed to have everything figured out and were concerned that they didn’t (Erickson, 1968; Piran & Ross, 2005). Those who were supposed to attend college expressed discomfort knowing that decision time was looming. Some felt challenged to make a decision when they were unable to visit a campus due to COVID-19 restrictions. Others felt that adults expected them to know what they wanted to do or be. Rather than viewing themselves as individuals in process, they thought that they were supposed to be fully formed individuals (Erickson, 1968; Gilligan, 1982). While some girls were giving themselves permission to deal with ambiguity, others were not. Some girls were worried about the future, a concern expressed by many other middle-class girls who see themselves as having options and choices about what they want to do with their lives (Gonick, 2006; Harris, 2004).

Generating Theory about Jewish Activist Girls

The findings helped inform important discoveries about how Jewish activist girls navigated their relationship to voice, visibility, and representation; the challenges they faced as activists; and how they exercised resistance against them. As described in Chapter 3, grounded theory is particularly useful for understanding phenomena for which little information exists (Glaser & Strauss, 1990). This is achieved through a process of constant coding and analysis, memoing, and theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Given that the theory comes from the data, it helps to bring marginalized voices, such as Jewish activist girls', to the center and generate knowledge from their lived experiences (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The theory that emerged was grounded in my interpretation of what the girls said and reflected their lived experiences.

Explaining Jewish Identification

The findings revealed that Jewish identification had a significant influence on how the Jewish activist girls in the study related to voice, action, and meaning-making. My definition of Jewish identification included the many ways girls related to being Jewish, since it was a personal identity for each girl that intersected with her other identities (Crenshaw, 1989). Drawing upon wisdom from Evelyn Torton Beck (1988) and Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz (1991), who describe the diverse ways that people understand Jewishness and Jewish teens' desire to have "agency in designing their own experiences" (Bryfman et al., 2019, p. 34), Jewish identification meant different things to each girl. It depended on how she felt about being Jewish, who she was with, where she was, and how she perceived herself in the moment. In some cases, girls' Jewish identification inspired them to speak up for their religious identity and what they envisioned it to be. This was exemplified through Tova's desire to start a GSA at her school and

Phoebe's desire to create traditional egalitarian prayer spaces. In others, girls' Jewish identification compelled them to stand up for their Jewishness, as was the case with Daniella, who started a JSU at her school after she experienced Antisemitism. Girls' Jewish identification also caused them to wrestle with other aspects of their identity, such as race and gender identity.

Girls' Jewish identification also inspired them to act in certain ways and see the world through a particular lens. This was evidenced through the multiple selves they revealed, the concerns that they shared, the experiences they had, and how they wished to be viewed by others. This suggests Jewish identification meant different things to girls at different times since they were balancing other identities and commitments (Jenkins, 2008; Marcia, 1994). Each girl's Jewish identification was unique to her. However, it united them and their activism. It also set them apart from other girls. Whereas other terms of identity have focused on what being Jewish means to a person and what they do to bring Judaism into their lives, Jewish identification is both a noun and an adjective. It articulates what girls' Jewishness compels them to do in addition to and beyond a religious sense. To date, most measures of teen engagement measure their participation in programs and their feelings about being Jewish— their being served— rather than their active citizenship (see The Jewish Education Project & Rosov Consulting, 2016, 2019). This speaks to the need to foreground this concept and Jewish girls' experiences within intersectionality discourse.

Introducing the Jewish Identification Model

The Jewish Identification Model (see Figure 5) features the different components of the theory. While Jewish identification is at the center, it is surrounded by six interrelated concepts, each of which informs Jewish activist girls' relationships to voice, visibility, and representation. These include identity wrestling, experiences with alienation, exclusion, and indifference, figuring out which self to show, (re)educating oneself and constructing new knowledge, exercising agency and resistance, and strength in community. In the following sections, I explain each component of the theory and connect them to the relevant literature (see Table 6). Table 6 describes how the findings and subfindings apply to different components of the Jewish Identification Model.

Figure 5

Jewish Identification Model

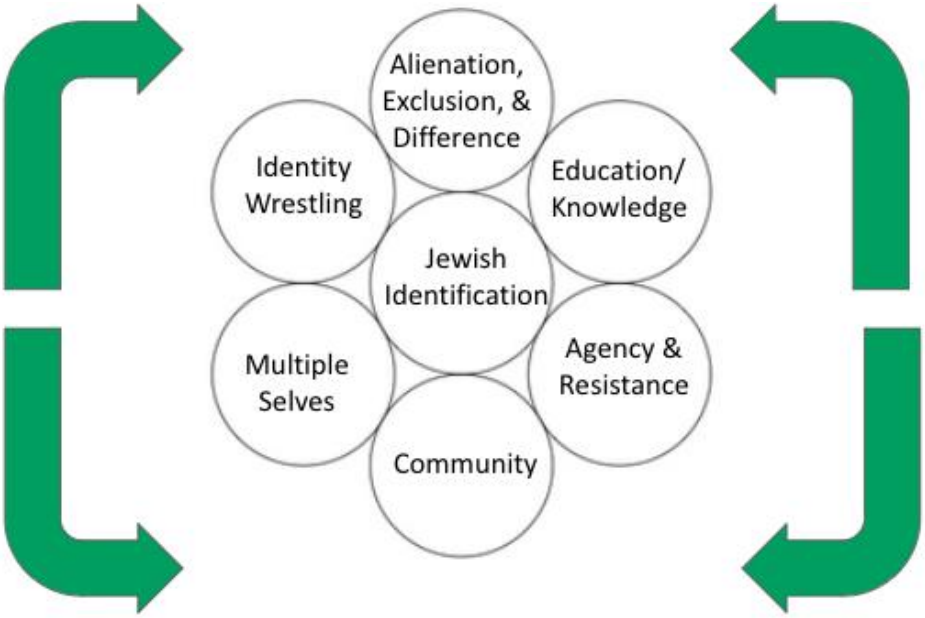
Alienation, Exclusion, & Difference
Identity Wrestling
Education/ Knowledge
Jewish Identification
Multiple Selves
Agency & Resistance
Community

Table 2

Definition of Model

Theme	Finding 1	Finding 2	Finding 3	Finding 4	Finding 5
Identity Wrestling	*Girls were wrestling with questions regarding spirituality and gender within Judaism*	*Girls were figuring out when and how to respond to Antisemitism and criticism against Israel*	*Girls were negotiating when and where to reveal signs and symbols of their Judaism and evaluating what it meant to be considered a Jew*	*Girls were trying to make sense of how their race, ethnicity, class, and gender identities intersected with their meaning-making experiences*	*Girls shared their mental health challenges and their experiences to find community*
Experiences with Alienation, Exclusion and Indifference	*Girls felt that the Jewish communities they participated in were not inclusive of all individuals*	*Girls felt alienated when friends and teachers failed to support them regarding Antisemitism and Jewish invisibility*	*Girls worried that they would be discriminated against if they shared their identification with Israel*	*Girls felt that people failed to see fundamental aspects of their identity*	*Girls shared their experiences with alienation and bullying*
Figuring out which self to show	*Girls felt that they had to choose between their religious and feminist identities*	*Girls had to think about when and how to respond to Antisemitism and criticism against Israel*	*Girls had to consider when and where to show signs of their Jewishness and their identification with Israel*	*Girls were trying to make sense of different identities*	*Girls with mental health issues decided to share their stories with others*
(Re)Educating Oneself and Constructing New Knowledge	*Girls were growing and evolving Jewish ritual and tradition*	*Girls were exploring new ways to understand Israel's relationship with Palestinians*	*Girls were making decisions for themselves about what it meant to navigate the world as a Jew*	*Jewish girls viewed themselves from a position of strength*	*Girls were finding growth and connection through community*

Theme	Finding 1	Finding 2	Finding 3	Finding 4	Finding 5
Exercising Agency and Resistance	*Girls were thinking critically about how they wanted to participate in Judaism*	*Jewish girls engaged in activities to respond to Antisemitism and define their own relationship with Israel*	*Girls related to their Jewish signs and symbols as sites of resistance against Antisemitism*	*Girls were speaking about mental health issues*	*Girls were rethinking their perspectives on mental health and engaging in activism around it*
Strength in Community	*Girls relied on the legacy of Jewish feminist activists to guide and support them*	*Jewish girls were mobilizing peers in their schools around Antisemitism*	*Girls viewed Jewish signs and symbols as markers of tribal affiliation*	*Jewish girls benefited from the support offered around the identity issues they were navigating*	*Girls felt a special bond with friendships and mentoring relationships formed in Jewish informal settings*

Identity Wrestling

This connects to Findings 1, 3, 4, and 5. The girls in the study were wrestling with, contending with, and figuring out the multiplicities of their identities (Gergen, 1991; Jenkins, 2008). They were making sense of who they were, who they wanted to be, and constructing new knowledge about their lives (Rutstein-Riley & Ziergiebel, 2018, 2020). Their experiences were informed by a constellation of factors, including where they lived, their family arrangements, the Jewish communities they were a part of (if they were), their religious upbringing, their gender and/or sexual identity, race and ethnicity, educational experiences, peer group, physical health, emotional health, social class, and a host of other variables. As noted by Tatum (2000):

> Integrating one's past, present, and future into a cohesive, unified sense of self is a complex task that begins in adolescence and continues for a lifetime... The salience of particular aspects of our identity vary at different moments in our lives. When we think about our multiple identities, most of us will find that we are both dominant and targeted

> at the same time. But it is the targeted identities that hold our attention and the dominant identities that often go unexamined. (p. 10)

This was the case with the girls in the study, who were wrestling with their identities and were made to feel vulnerable due to the ways that others perceived them. The process was exceedingly complex for girls who were marginalized in multiple aspects of their lives because they were trying to bridge their identities together. In reflecting on her Mexican heritage, Yael feels that "I can walk okay through a Jewish world, but like, I stumble and fall on the Mexican American side. Maybe I get that idea because I spend all my time, like, in a Jewish world."

While the process of identity development is invariably challenging for all adolescent girls, the girls in the study were faced with the unique tasks of navigating Antisemitism, determining their relationship with Israel, figuring out their religious identities, and thinking about how their Jewish difference impacted their sense of self. This required them to share different aspects of themselves at different times and to think about how they wanted others to perceive them. Jewish activist girls' identity work is an intricate and complicated process. It is one that differs from non-Jewish girls' in significant ways given the impact of Jewish identification on their meaning-making experiences.

Experiences with Alienation, Exclusion, and Indifference

This is connected to Finding 2, where girls spoke about the alienation, exclusion, and indifference they experienced from peers, teachers, and community members when they experienced Antisemitism, criticism against Israel, or were made to feel invisible for being Jewish. They longed for allyship in these situations and for people to acknowledge that Antisemitism was a problem or to engage in conversations with them about the complexities they experienced regarding Israel. The girls were frustrated to realize that the adults who were supposed to support them were either indifferent or unable to support them with their needs. They were also disappointed by their non-Jewish friends, who failed to understand the urgency of their causes.

Chloe was upset when her friends did not “like” her online activism. While her identification with Antisemitism and Israel may have seemed insignificant to them, they were important to her, and she was made to feel alone in this experience. She and other girls felt that if they did not respond to issues in their communities, no one else would. This placed a heavy burden on them since they saw themselves as capable but also responsible for responding to Antisemitism and anti-Israel rhetoric in their communities (Bent, 2020; Harris, 2004). While they were committed to their causes, they also felt a sense of despondency. Alaina noted how people “like” other social justice causes besides Antisemitism. This is noteworthy since it sounded as if she was critically evaluating her position about her activism.

The tensions experienced by Jewish girl activists are seemingly familiar. They reflect those felt by Jewish activists and scholars who have been excluded from progressive organizations and institutions that are inhospitable to Israel or slow to condemn Antisemitism. Branfman (2019) notes that these tensions have intensified due to what some Jewish feminists perceive as the feminist movement’s vociferous opposition against Israel. He notes:

> Many in feminist, queer, and critical race studies may fear that acknowledging Jewishness as social difference or anti- Semitism as oppression automatically means endorsing Israeli nationalism, excusing Israel’s violence against Palestinians, and denying Palestinian oppression—or risking that others will accuse you of doing so. These fears reflect broader anxiety that addressing Antisemitism means distracting from other oppressions and ignoring all Jewish access to privilege. (p. 130)

While Branfman refers to the exclusion of these topics from university-based discourses, the findings from this study indicate that Jewish girls are contending with the impact of Antisemitism and criticism against Israel in their daily environments.

Figuring Out Which Self to Show: Jewish Identity Performance

This is connected to Finding 3. Jewishness, like all other identities, is a performative and culturally specific identity (Butler, 1990). Girls' comfort with sharing this identity depended on the community in which they lived, the messages they received from people about what it meant to be Jewish, their family's history, and their own experiences with navigating this identity. Girls had to consider the selves they wanted people to see and how they wanted to be known to others (Cooley, 1902). To a certain extent, other than "looking Jewish," girls could take measures to reveal or conceal their Jewishness. This provoked feelings of confusion in girls, since they were proud of this identity and didn't want to hide it. Jordana feels that she has to close herself off from her Jewish identity when she is in certain activist spaces. While she wants to participate in them, she is concerned that people will reject her if they find out about her identification with Israel:

> I think the hard part is like, Israel as a whole is so misunderstood so it's hard for me and activist spaces to come out and say that 'Yes like I am Jewish, and Israel is important to me.' I feel like I kind of have to censor myself in a way to make sure that people still trust me and are taking me seriously when it comes to other activist issues…which, I think, is a problem because I don't think that I should have to conceal like, any part of my Jewish identity to like, be accepted in mainstream activist spaces. Like, I try not to bring it up like, to protect myself mentally and also just because you never really know how people are gonna react. So, I feel like it's hard, because I want to talk about Judaism and

> Israel and all those things, but I feel like the way that I talk about Judaism will be taken the wrong way by certain people very quickly. So, I feel like parts of my Jewish identity have to be censored, because I think right now, like being Jewish is, I don't know…like, highly politicized.

Jordana's narrative is significant in terms of what it tells us about her commitments and her psychology (Gilligan, 1991). While she has the option of dissociating herself from these activists, she chooses not to. This suggests that Antisemitism and the conflict surrounding Israel add a critical yet unexplored layer of complexity to Jewish girls' identity-making experiences. Other girls cited similar concerns, which indicates the need for further exploration in this area, particularly since girls do not feel as though they are able to bring their authentic selves into activist spaces.

(Re)Educating Oneself and Constructing New Knowledge

This is connected to Findings 1, 2, and 4. The girls described how they were constructing knowledge about themselves and the world. They were examining their relationship to power and privilege and thinking about what they wanted to stand for. This is indicative of critical consciousness, where people show awareness of systemic inequalities around them and work to change them (Freire, 1970). Clonan-Roy et al. (2016) discuss how girls and women can use critical consciousness to "critique and respond to the power structures within their lives" (p. 104). Some girls were reflecting critically on their education. They were dissatisfied with what they had learned about Israel, race, and gender. Claudia was surprised to learn that Palestinian people had been forcibly removed from their homes in 1948. As she grappled with this complicated information, she found respite through meetings with Muslim peers at her school. Together, they engaged in conversations about how they could move the conversation forward together.

According to Bent (2020), girl activists are committed to ongoing learning and education:

> Given their location as students, it is not surprising that teenagers would place a particular emphasis on education and learning within social movements. To a certain extent, this identity position partially explains why they prioritize this social change strategy. As teenagers and high school students, girl activists are highly aware of what they don't know. As new activists, they continually express that there is a great deal more that they want to learn about politics, social change, and the social world. Thus, their student and youth identity narratives support their strategic emphasis on learning. (p. 116)

This suggests that as girls acquired new knowledge, they were able to see things differently and apply a critical lens to the world around them. This marked a shift in who they were, what they wanted to stand for, and where they saw themselves in relation to power. Rather than seeing themselves outside the systems they wanted to change, they recognized their agency within them with hopes of finding common ground with others.

Exercising Agency and Resistance

This connects to all five findings. Girls' activism was inspired by their internalization of Jewish values, a belief in their own agency, and their hope for a better future (Harris, 2004; Taft, 2011). Many girls were raised by families who encouraged them to stand up for what they believed in, while others belonged to organizations that supported them in their endeavors. While some girls struggled to step into their power or find the right way to exercise it, they overwhelmingly believed that their voices mattered and that they could make a difference. However, many girls were navigating their activism alone, or they were trying to spearhead initiatives for which there was limited support. Brown (2016) observes that "in the absence of full public stories about what girls and young women have accomplished in the face of violence, oppression, and discrimination, the activism they engage in is misunderstood, maligned, and joked about, even by their friends" (p. 65).

Some girls were able to have their voices heard in different ways than others, due to their access to racial privilege, cultural capital, and socioeconomic wealth. Those who lived in areas where they were surrounded by like-minded people had access to communities where they felt supported and grounded in their activist journey. This depended on the issues they were speaking about, to whom they were speaking, and how they were speaking about them (whether online or in person, and where they were doing this). Some of this also depended on their confidence in themselves.

Some girls were also more outspoken and persistent than others. Sivan was in charge of the Israel club at her day school. She became frustrated by the administration's anti-Israel approach and challenged the head of school on it. She felt that it was important to "see the validity of the many narratives that surround the conflict. I'm very clear, clear and intentional about that." Sivan was firm in her perspective, and she refused to back down. She got the board involved, and the school eventually reversed its position. Sivan's commitment to providing multiple perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict compelled her to act on behalf of her Jewish identity.

Changing Judaism

This is connected to Findings 1, 2, 3, and 4. Some participants, like Phoebe and Tova, were committed to challenging structural boundaries and practices in traditional Judaism. Tova wanted to create more opportunities for women and LGBTQ+ individuals in her community, and Phoebe wanted to create traditional prayer spaces for nonbinary Jews and explore their Jewish identity. They saw Judaism as a permeable religion, and they believed in their ability to effect change. This suggests that religious identity can serve as a form of activism and social change, as it has for Muslim girls who choose to wear a *hijab* as a sign of personal and political resistance (Hermansen & Khan, 2009). Tova feels that:

> Each person has a different way of understanding the Torah. I think that there are ways to understand the Torah that match with my values and my beliefs with the inclusion and validation of people in the LGBT community and roles for women. So, like, that's what I think, but a lot of people in my community don't think that. We always have to try to find new ways to understand and make sense of it.

Tova believes in the power of her voice (Clark, 2000; Philips, 1997; Ward, 2000). She claims that "most people know my politics and my beliefs about Judaism. So, I don't really have so much to lose. They already know all this stuff about me, so I speak up. I'm not afraid to challenge something." Tova and Phoebe are joining an enduring tradition of other Jewish activists who have advocated for change within Jewish communal life and tradition and moved it forward (see Antler, 2018; Plaskow, 1990). They are inspired to act because they want to make Judaism a more accepting religion. They are advocating for change *within* their Jewish communities because they care about being Jewish and want their community to reflect their values.

Being in Community

This is connected to Findings 2, 4, and 5. Through the focus groups and surveys, the girls conveyed the importance of community in helping them feel grounded and connected. The girls derived a sense of community through Jewish spaces, mentors, teachers, and even each other. While they were activists who stood up to injustice, they also needed friendship, caring, and support (Taft, 2011). This speaks to the relational context that is critical for their development and well-being (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Jordan, 2005). While girls felt supported in some contexts, they felt less so in others. Miriam always feels supported by her rabbi. He answers her questions and treats her the same as all the other synagogue members. She muses, “I love the rabbi. He is the sweetest thing ever, and I feel like I can just go up to him and ask him whatever questions I want. He’s not judging me.” Miriam values her connection with her rabbi, particularly when she feels that other members of her synagogue look down on her. This relationship helps her feel seen as a Jew and makes her feel like she matters.

The girls acknowledged friends and mentors who helped them feel cared for and seen. Mia describes how a youth group advisor helped her navigate her coming-out process, which could have been a challenging:

> The first time that I came out was at a youth group convention. My youth group leader felt like an older sister. She has been like the biggest mentor to me. She brought in Jewish values and all that kind of stuff and helped me deal with my sexuality.

Rutstein-Riley and Ziergiebel (2018) discuss feminist relational mentoring as “an empathetic response to the powerful force craving connection, a desire to contribute to others, and a yearning to serve something larger than ‘the self’” (p. 164). Mia related to her youth group as a “sister,” and it is likely that her youth group leader felt that way, too. Mia has since become an advocate for LGBTQ+ issues.

There is a robust body of literature that endorses the positive effects of formal and informal mentoring on girls’ healthy development (see Brown, 2016; Clonan-Roy et. al, 2016; Rhodes et al., 2007; Rutstein-Riley & Ziergiebel, 2018, 2020). Rhodes et al. (2007) explain that “mentors can serve as alternative or secondary attachment figures, helping girls realign their conceptions of themselves in relation to other people" (p. 145). During the focus groups, the girls shared how they appreciated having a safe space where they could speak with other Jewish peers about their activism, their identities, and difficult topics such as Israel, race, and Antisemitism. They noted that they had few, if any, spaces where they could openly discuss topics such as these issues. This also shows how girls can offer support to one another.

Summary of Model

The Jewish Identification Model described the way that Jewish activist girls experienced their identities, related to activism, and perceived themselves across multiple settings. The six concepts of the model are interrelated, with Jewish identification at the center. The different components interacted with one another and simultaneously informed one another. At times, one concept could be more significant than another to express the multiplicity of girls' experiences. They operated in a constant fashion and informed the way that Jewish girls experienced and responded to injustice.

Implications

This work has important implications for Jewish communal professionals, members of the girls' studies community, individuals who work with and care about Jewish adolescent girls, and Jewish girls themselves. The study revealed the complexity of Jewish girls' lives, their identity-making processes, and the diversity within the population. It also demonstrated how Jewish girls are showing resistance and resilience in their schools, their religious institutions, and their communities. To date, there is a paucity of information about Jewish girls in both girls' studies literature and Jewish communal research. Jewish girls should be included in both of these literatures as a unique population. They are making important contributions to their communities and beyond. They are a population that stretches across race, ethnicity, geographic location, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical ability, and more. The findings in the study made it clear that Jewish activist girls lead complex lives that extend beyond White, middle-class girlhood. Jewish activist girls would be well-served by being included in intersectionality discourse so that scholars, practitioners, and activists can better understand the fullness of their experiences and work in partnership with them to build a better future.

Many of the girls were trying to make sense of identities that were not privileged in the social institutions they interacted with. This got in the way of their self-identification process and caused emotional harm to the girls. This predicates the need for intersectionality discourse to include their experiences since it allows for a deeper understanding of the multiple identities of who they are and how they contribute to the world (see Brettscheneider, 2016). The theory derived from this study has important implications for future research with Jewish activist girls and beyond. It demonstrates how Jewish identification informs Jewish activist girls' relationships to voice, representation, and visibility by providing them with a specific worldview. It has a significant impact on the way they perceive barriers as activists and how they respond to them. It

This model could make an important contribution to the literature on how Jewish adolescents experience and respond to injustice. To date, most of the scholarship focuses on young people’s experiences with Antisemitism and anti-Zionism (see Bakal et al., 2015; Cohen Research Group, 2021; Wright et al., 2021) or how they react to them (Catlett et al., 2019), but few resources link them together. The majority of research focuses on college students, and it is rarely intersectional.

While the model could be tested with other adolescent populations, Jewish identification would have to be replaced with another relevant identity. However, it could be used with other populations of girls who are also inspired to activism because of a marginalized identity. For example, McArthur and Muhammad (2017) conducted a creative writing project with Black Muslim girls aged 12 to 17, where they asked them to write poetry about their multiple identities. The themes that emerged from the girls' writing included sisterhood and unity, shattering misrepresentations, empowerment, strength through faith, knowledge (education), and speaking up and fighting for rights. The salient themes suggest Black Muslim girls should be considered for testing the model.

While this research study reached a significant number of Jewish adolescent girls, it is not a representative sample. Orthodox Jews are the fastest growing population in America (Pew Research Center, 2020a). While this does not diminish the importance of the study, it is important to make note of this discrepancy. The implications of this study also revealed that Jewish activist girls have complicated lives. They are doing extraordinary things that aren't being acknowledged by the girls' studies community or researchers who study Jewish communal life. They also want to make a difference in the world, and they want to talk about their experiences. As noted by many girls in the study, Jewish girls who are White were being conflated with Whiteness, even when their Jewish identity was significant to them. Moreover, there is incredible religious, cultural, racial, gender, socioeconomic, and geographical diversity within the population. Jewish communal researchers and professionals should be prepared to address the diversity within the population. More efforts must be made to develop programs and services to reach girls in underserved communities, particularly non-White girls and girls who do not identify with Judaism in traditional ways.

Many of the Jewish girls in the study who lived in remote locations were hungry for programs and resources but felt that they were out of reach. While COVID-19 opened an unprecedented opportunity for them to participate in online activities, they felt disconnected from Jewish life. This indicates a need for girls' studies and Jewish communal researchers to better understand their lives. The findings also showed that Jewish girls of color wanted to identify with other Jewish girls of color, and girls who were White wanted a space to openly speak about race. The girls also asked for opportunities to speak amongst themselves rather than be "talked down to" by adults. They wanted people who would support them with their goals and needs. This requires listening to them and working in partnership with them.

Unique Research Model

While COVID-19 brought unprecedented challenges, meeting the girls through Zoom provided unique insights into building rapport with them and learning about their identities. It enabled me to cast a wider net with my research sample and to connect with girls from diverse geographic areas and populations. I was able to work around the girls' schedules and bring them together for focus groups fairly easily. Despite never meeting the girls in person, I was able to build meaningful connections with them and learn about their lives. This is a method that is worthy of further investigation for connecting with girls and learning about their lives.

Limitations, Recommendations, and Conclusion

Trustworthiness

I implemented several measures to ensure trustworthiness. I followed the prescribed steps of grounded theory, which included an ongoing process of comparing and analyzing data, memoing, and reaching theoretical saturation before developing theory (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). The range and depth of the study process, i.e., interview, survey, and focus groups, also helped to inform the reliability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I relied on the members of my committee as important thought partners to ensure that what I was seeing accurately reflected the lived experiences of the girls. The process of memoing and discussions with my committee members helped me bracket my assumptions. However, there were contradictions in the data, which speaks to the messiness of adolescence and Jewish activist girls' meaning-making processes (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Jenkins, 2008). I acknowledged these contradictions and incorporated them into the data analysis.

Limitations

The study had several limitations. As a feminist researcher who is invested in working with Jewish girls, it was important to acknowledge my bias and engage in reflexivity throughout the research process (Josselson, 2013). It was important to consider how my life experiences differed from the girls' and to reflect on my own positionality since it ultimately influenced my interpretation of the data. My views of religion, LGBTQ+ issues, Israel, and so on influenced how I interpreted what the girls said and how they said it (Josselson, 2013). When I felt myself making a judgment or feeling uncertain about something, I resorted to journaling and speaking with my advisor, Dr. Amy Rutstein-Riley. I did this frequently throughout the data collection and analysis process. As much as I reflected on what the girls said, I also wrote about my own feelings and identity. I returned to the data when I was concerned that I misunderstood something the girls said or took it out of context (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, it is possible that I allowed bias to inadvertently affect the research process.

Zoom. There were benefits and challenges to using this methodology for the interviews and focus groups. Zoom offered a new and unexplored opportunity to build rapport and relationships. It enabled me to meet with and connect with girls from across the country during a time when it was otherwise impossible. It provided girls with an opportunity to feel listened to and heard during a time of crisis. Girls built meaningful connections in the focus groups and shared their stories, struggles, and accomplishments with one another. In one of the White focus groups, girls stated that they rarely had the opportunity to discuss how their Whiteness intersected with their Jewishness since it felt like a taboo subject. In the girls of color focus group, two girls of color formed an immediate bond as they did not know other Jewish girls of color. This demonstrates the relational value of the study provided to girls.

Meeting over Zoom also had its limitations, including poor connectivity and reliability. During two of the interviews, the connection was untenable, and the girls and I had to reschedule our interview session. Online interviewing came with other challenges. For example, a few of the girls forgot about our scheduled interviews, even when I sent reminders. In one case, this was a fortuitous event because another girl happened to contact me, and I was able to interview her in place of the other girl — this was a convenience of conducting online interviews. However, another challenge was that I was unable to fully see the girls' faces and read their body language, which posed challenges in building a relationship with the girls.

Outreach Criteria. Another challenge came with recruiting girls for the study. An initial goal was to recruit as "diverse" a sample as possible, which I did. While I initially planned to include 20 girls in the study, I decided to keep growing the sample size to represent the multiplicity of Jewish girls' experiences. While the sample was "diverse," it would not have been possible to represent the entirety of the girls' experiences since each Jewish girl has her own unique identity. However, I regret that I was unable to recruit girls who were traditional Orthodox, Mizrahi, transgender, physically disabled, working class, or members of other traditionally marginalized groups. This was not for a lack of trying. The goal was not to essentialize but rather to hear girls' perspectives from different identity groups and include their experiences in the emerging discourse on Jewish girls. I attribute some of the success I had with recruitment to "insider" knowledge. It was easier to recruit girls from communities where I had relationships (White, middle-class, and involved in communal Jewish life). However, this also comes with blinders, as it could have closed me off to connecting with other girls from other communities.

Activism. I initially described the study as one for Jewish girl activists because I was interested in examining the lives of Jewish girls who were "speaking up" or responding to issues that they cared about. The term "activist" was confusing for girls. Many girls were reluctant to adopt this label because they did not know whether the social justice work they participated in qualified as activism or if simply caring about political issues made them activists. This is a theme that is addressed in the emerging literature on girls' activism (see Taft, 2011, 2014). Other girls considered themselves activists. They described it as an identity that differentiated them from others (Taft, 2011). In some cases, their activism was seeded by family members, and in others, girls came into it on their own. This research could be further served by examining girls' relationships to activism and finding out what activism means to them, how they become activists, how they become active around particular causes, and what feminism means to them.

COVID-19. The study took place during the height of COVID-19, when people were in isolation and most of the girls were attending school online. The girls were dealing with the stress of isolation from peers and the lack of consistency in their everyday lives (Radhakrishnan et al., 2022; Weiner et al., 2020). In some ways, this could have added to their desire to be interviewed, given that they were craving companionship and wanting to talk about their experiences. The tensions and racial reckoning surrounding George Floyd's murder also could not be ignored and likely informed how girls were thinking about issues around race and identity. It is worth noting that vaccines became available toward the end of data collection— in May of 2021. Girls who aged 16 and older were eligible to receive them. This coincided with the focus group schedule, and it became increasingly difficult to schedule girls to participate in them, hence the lower but still meaningful participation rate, with 20 out of 32 girls participating.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research underscores the need for future research with Jewish adolescent girls. Future research should focus on the following areas:

LGBTQ Girls. It was important to center and uplift the experiences of LGBTQ+ girls given that they are often “characterized as a problem to be solved, being in a phase that they will (or must) grow out of, or a minor point in a larger debate about young female sexuality” (Brickman, 2019, p. vii). This suggests that LGBTQ+ girls/participants perceive barriers to their full inclusion in Jewish spaces and that the burden is on them rather than the social conditions around them to “change” by finding ways to cope and/or resist (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016; Rutstein-Riley & Ziergiebel, 2018). Given the large number of girls/participants who identified as LGBTQ+, Jewish girls would be well-served to have support in navigating these identities.

Intersectionality. While Jewish girls have been precluded from discourses of intersectionality, it proved to be a critical framework for understanding their experiences and examining how the interlocking forces of privilege, marginalization, and invisibility shaped their experiences (Collins, 1990, 2000). The girls were examining questions around faith, relationships, Israel, gender, sexuality, Antisemitism, and race and trying to locate themselves within these narratives. It is important to continue this work and to gain a deeper understanding of how Jewish girls respond to experiences of otherness and how they resist them.

Jewish Girls’ Activism. Despite the growing discourse on girls’ activism (see Bent, 2016, 2020; Brown, 2016; Taft, 2011, 2014), Jewish girls are missing from it. This study shows that Jewish girls are contributing to the field of activism in important ways— and because of their Jewish identity. There is an important need for continued scholarship in this area.

Conclusion

This was an exploratory study with 32 Jewish girl activists. The goal was to center their experiences and share their knowledge, concerns, and contributions. I hoped to raise questions, observations, and suggestions rather than discover an ultimate truth about them, and to offer new directions for future scholarship and education. These findings are meant to add to the dearth of literature that currently exists about their lives. I hope the findings will encourage scholars, practitioners, and researchers to think about Jewish girls and include them in nuanced discussions around identity and activism. That said, this project was one that was co-constructed in partnership with Jewish girls. I endeavored to bring their thoughts and experiences to the forefront of academic discourse and to make their challenges, experiences, and accomplishments known. Consistent with dominant girls' studies paradigms, it is important to view girls as in-process and to consider the challenges they experienced as a necessary component of strength-building rather than as a sign of struggle or weakness (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Lerner et al., 2005; Taft, 2011). While they all struggled and thrived in different ways, a few factors remained consistent. The Jewish activist girls in the study were committed to being Jewish; it was an identity they felt passionately about and that they were proud of. Moreover, it was one that they were constructing on their own terms.

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Appendix A

Are you a High School-age Jewish girl who is committed to activism?

Study on Jewish Girls and Activism

I CAN'T BREATHE
BLACK LIVES MATTER
I CAN'T BREATHE
SILENCE

Research Opportunity:

Thanks for looking into this opportunity! My name is Cheryl Weiner, and I am a doctoral student at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA where I study Jewish girls' activism and leadership. I am conducting research to understand how Jewish high-school age girls* who are involved in activist work navigate their intersectional identities. Specifically, I am looking for a racially, ethnically, economically, religiously and sexually diverse group of girls to participate in this study. **The goal here is to elevate and center girls' voices.**

Participation will consist of two ninety to one hundred and twenty-minute interviews and a one-time focus group . These will all take place over Zoom. Your name and identity will be confidential, and you can opt out of the study at any time. If you are interested in learning more about the study, please contact me at: cweiner@lesley.edu, or 617-285-0026. Thank you!

*This includes anyone who identifies as "girl"

Appendix B

Lesley UNIVERSITY

Participant Initials __________________

ASSENT FORM FOR CHILDREN/MINORS IN A RESEARCH STUDY

You are being asked to participate in two research interviews and a focus group so I can learn about your experience as a Jewish adolescent girl who is involved in activist work. I am conducting this research to understand how Jewish adolescent girls who are involved in activist work experience their multiple identities. Specifically, I want to know what inspires them to do this work, and how it impacts their sense of self.

During the interview and the focus group, I will ask you a series of questions about your life and your experiences. Your responses are confidential and they will be used for research purposes only. I will not share your answers with anyone else. I will assign you a pseudonym. I will disguise other identifying details, such as your school and where you live, in my research.

During the interviews and the focus group, you can choose to skip any questions that you don’t want to answer. You can also decide to end the interviews and leave the focus group at any time with no questions asked.

I need to record the interviews and the focus group so I can transcribe them later. I may take a few notes to remember certain things. I won’t share the recording with anyone, and any materials I have will be securely locked away so that no one else can see them. Please know that you can ask me questions about the interviews, focus groups, or the project at any time. This application is approved for one calendar year from the date of approval, which is February 17, 2021.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Weiner

Child’s Assent: I have been told about the research project and know why it is being done and what to do. I also know that I do not have to do it if I do not want to. If I have questions, I can ask Cheryl Weiner.

I know that I can stop participating in the research project at any time.

My parents/guardians know that I am being asked to be in this research project.

______________________________	____________________
Child’s Signature	Date

List of individuals authorized to obtain assent

Cheryl Weiner Investigator	617-285-0026

Appendix C

Lesley UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent Letter

Dear Parent, Guardian, or Student,

My name is Cheryl Weiner and I am a doctoral student at Lesley University's Graduate School of Education. I am conducting a research project entitled "Jewish Adolescent Girls and Activism" with Jewish adolescent girls who are involved in activist work. The goal of the research is to understand how Jewish adolescent girls who identify as activists experience the intersection of their identities and where they locate themselves in the work.

For the purposes of the study, I am asking girls to prepare an identity map and to participate in two interviews and a focus group. (Please note that I may need to reach out with follow-up and/or clarifying questions). Both interviews and the focus group will take place over Zoom. If you prefer, we can schedule the interviews in a mutually agreed upon location with proper social distancing protocols in place. I would also like your permission to video and/or audiotape the interviews and focus groups to help with the data analysis process.

Please know that no names or identifying information will be used in the data collection process or analysis. All data that is collected on audiotapes and/or video is accessible to me only. The data will be used to document girls' experiences and what I learn from studying them. Data will be used for disseminating information about girls' experiences at community, professional, and academic conferences and for reports and publications.

There are no foreseeable risks or benefits to girls who participate in the project, other than contributing to the wider scholarship on Jewish adolescent girls' lived experiences. Participation in the research is voluntary. Participants have the right to refuse to participate in this study at any time. If they decide to participate in the study and change their mind, they have the right to drop out at any time without penalty. They can also refuse to answer any questions they are asked. Whatever they decide, they will not lose access to any benefits to which they are otherwise entitled.

Should you have any questions about the study, please contact Dr. Amy Rutstein-Riley at 617-349-8529. There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairpersons at irb@lesley.edu. This application is approved for one calendar year from the date of approval, which is February 17, 2021.

Please give your permission for ________________________________ to participate in the research project “Jewish Girls and Activism” by signing the enclosed consent form and return it to Cheryl Weiner, researcher, at cweiner@lesley@edu. Please keep this letter for your records.

___________	______________________________	________________________________
Date	Investigator's Signature	Print Name
___________	______________________________	________________________________
Date	Signature Parent/Guardian Legally Authorized Representative Participants eighteen and older	Print Name

Appendix D

Participant Initials ___________________

ASSENT FORM FOR CHILDREN/MINORS IN A RESEARCH STUDY

You are being asked to complete an online google survey because you participated in the research project, “Jewish Girls and Activism.” The online survey should take ten to fifteen minutes of your time to complete. The survey will help me learn more about your identity, and enable me to assign you to the appropriate focus group, if you choose to participate.

Please know that you do not have to complete the survey or participate in a focus group. Your decision to complete the survey and participate in a focus group are completely optional. In the survey, I will ask you to share your name and where you live. I will also ask you to describe your Jewish identity, whether you practice other religions, and to share what if any Jewish programs and/or organizations you participate in. I will also ask you about your race and/or ethnic group(s). This will help me understand how you think about your identity. I am also interested in understanding how you think about your gender and sexual orientation, and whether you feel that you can share these identities in Jewish spaces. Finally, I will ask you about your availability to participate in a focus group, and what kind of people you’d like to be in a focus group with.

You do not have to answer any of these questions. Even if you participated in the interview, there is no penalty to you if you choose not to take part in this part of the research. You can also choose to complete the survey and not participate in a focus group.

Your survey responses are completely private. They will be used for research purposes only. I will not share your answers with anyone else, and I will not use your real name or other identifying information, such as your school or where you live, in my research. You can skip any questions that you don’t want to answer. Any materials I have will be securely locked away so that no one else can see them. Please know that you can ask me questions about the interviews and focus group, and the project at any time.

This application is approved for one calendar year from the date of approval, which is February 17, 2021.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Weiner

Appendix E

Interview Instrument

Interview I

Thank you for joining me today. I am interested in learning about the experiences of Jewish adolescent girls who are involved in activist work. Specifically, I want to know how Jewish girls experience their intersectional identities, and where they locate themselves in the work. I can only understand this by learning about the actual experiences of girls. While I have a set of questions here, please know that our time together should feel more like a conversation. Your own thoughts, questions and comments are more than welcome, anytime and anywhere during our conversation. I'd like to start off by learning about you and your background.

1. Can you tell me about where you live, who you live with and what your upbringing was like?
2. What grade are you in? What kind of school do you attend? What is it like to be a student at your school?
3. Have you always lived in the same place?
4. Tell me about your Jewish practice and upbringing.
5. What is it like to be a Jewish person in your community?
6. What kind of activities are you involved with? What do you do for fun?
7. Who are the people who support you and inspire you?

Now I want to ask you about your identity. Identity means all the different parts that make you who you are.

8. How would you describe your identity?
9. What does being Jewish mean to you? Is Judaism a central part of your identity?
10. What aspects of your identity are the most significant to you?
11. How have your feelings and/or understandings of your identity changed over time? What contributed to these changes?
10. What does your Jewish life look like right now?

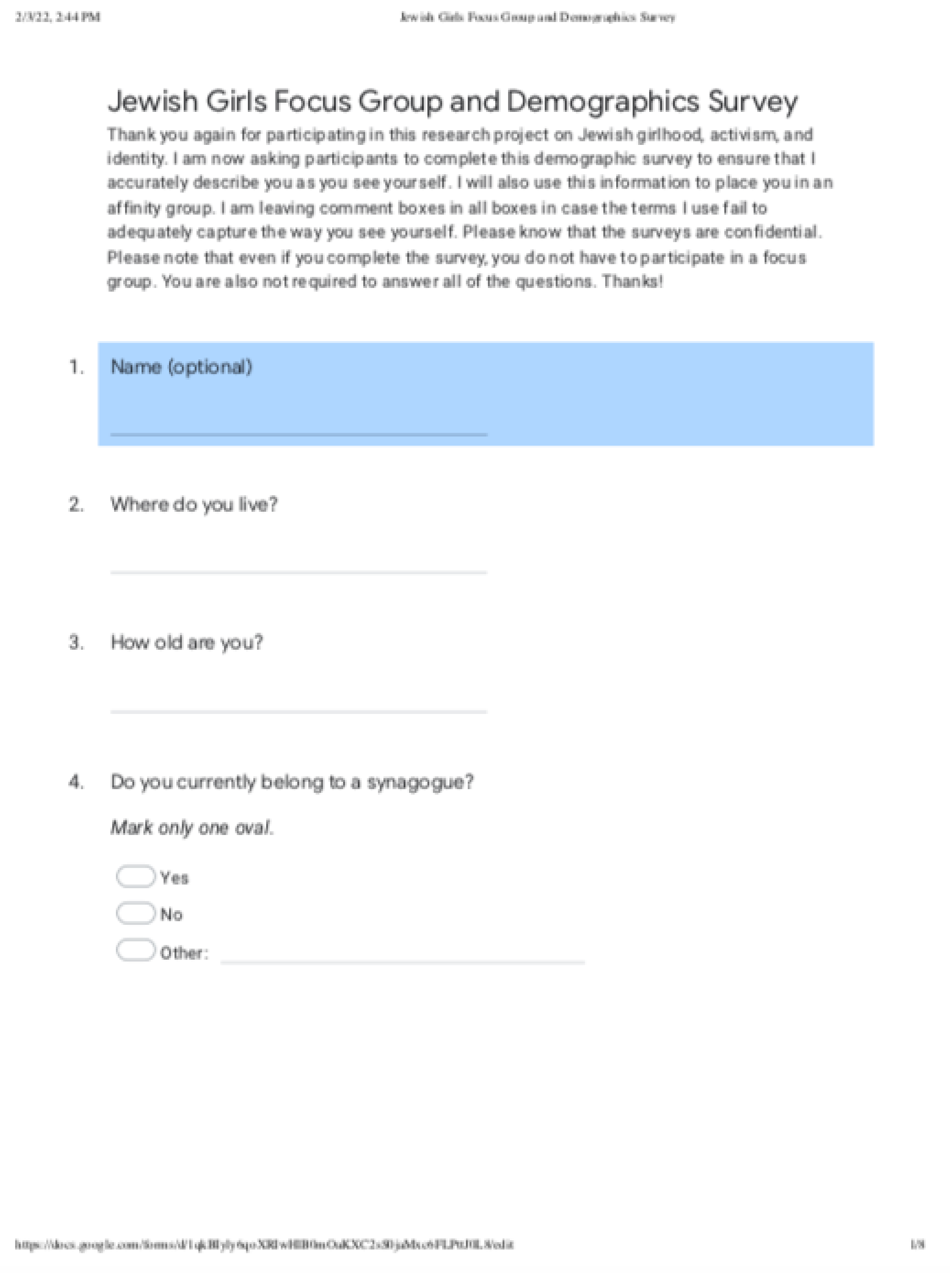
Now I'd like to know about your involvement in activist work and what it means to you.

11. What does being an activist mean to you?
12. Can you tell me about the activist work you're involved with?
13. How and where do you perform your activism?
14. How did you get involved in this work? Who or what inspired you?
15. How does your activist work intersect with your Jewish identity?
16. How does your activist identity mesh with the rest of your life?
17. Have you ever experienced conflict in activist settings because of your identity? How have you dealt with these situations? Conversely, have you ever experienced a situation where you were able to resolve a conflict?
18. There is a lot of debate among that Jews many progressive-leaning movements, such as Black Lives Matter and The National Women's March are Antisemitic. How do you feel about the positions of these movements? Have you spoken with other Jews about these

issues? What does this bring up for you?

19. How do you reconcile your activist identity against your feelings about Israel and Antisemitism? Do you discuss these topics with other people? Why or why not?
20. Do you tend to keep your concerns about activist issues to yourself or do you discuss them with other people? Are there certain spaces where you feel more comfortable speaking up than others? Please describe.
21. What have you learned about yourself through your activism?
22. How did it feel to talk about these issues?
23. Was anything important missing from the discussion?

Appendix F



2/3/22, 2:44 PM Jewish Girls Focus Group and Demographics Survey

Jewish Girls Focus Group and Demographics Survey

Thank you again for participating in this research project on Jewish girlhood, activism, and identity. I am now asking participants to complete this demographic survey to ensure that I accurately describe you as you see yourself. I will also use this information to place you in an affinity group. I am leaving comment boxes in all boxes in case the terms I use fail to adequately capture the way you see yourself. Please know that the surveys are confidential. Please note that even if you complete the survey, you do not have to participate in a focus group. You are also not required to answer all of the questions. Thanks!

1. Name (optional)

2. Where do you live?

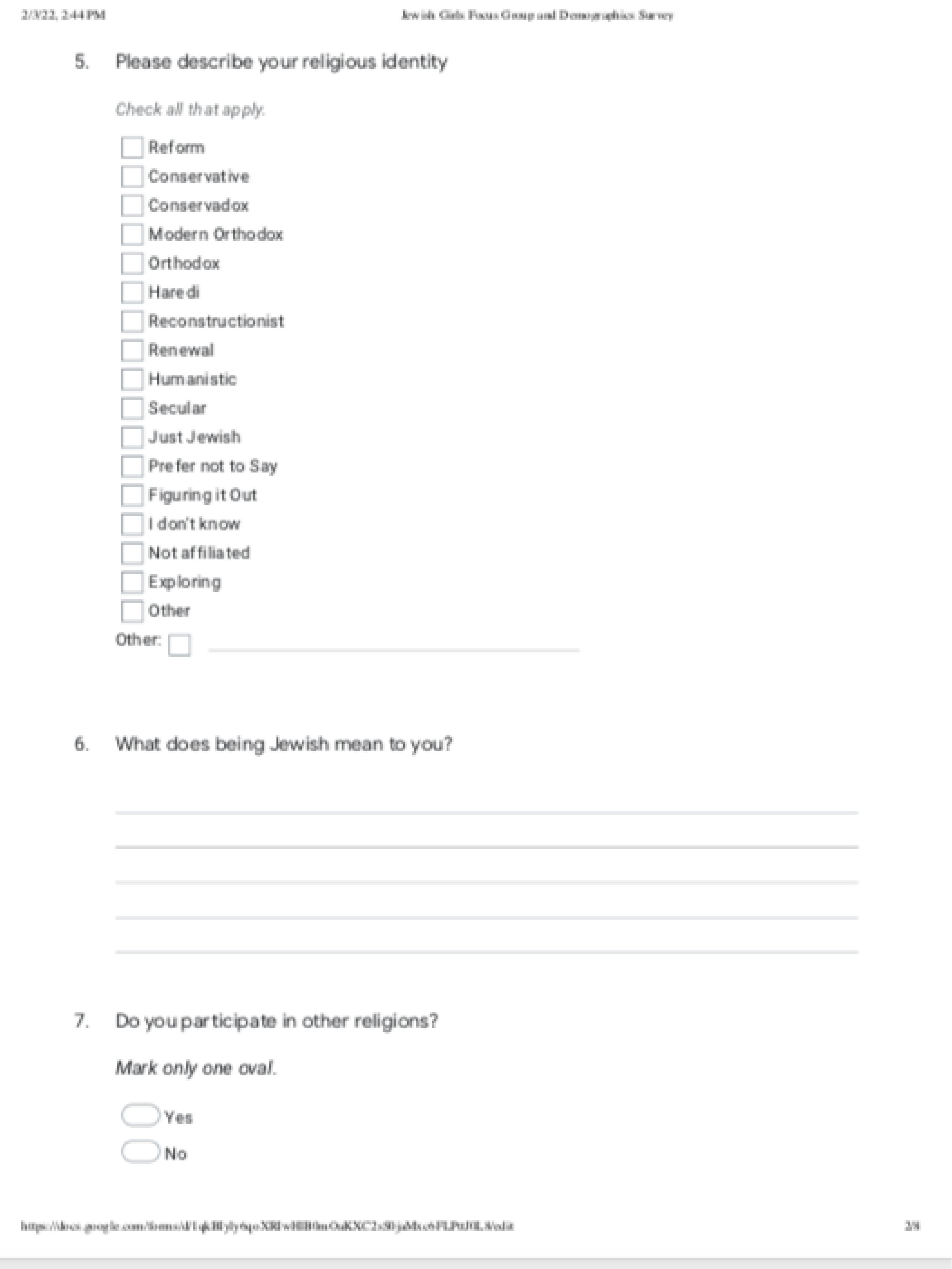
3. How old are you?

4. Do you currently belong to a synagogue?

Mark only one oval.

○ Yes
○ No
○ Other: ____________

1/8



2/3/22, 2:44 PM Jewish Girls Focus Group and Demographics Survey

5. Please describe your religious identity

Check all that apply.

☐ Reform
☐ Conservative
☐ Conservadox
☐ Modern Orthodox
☐ Orthodox
☐ Haredi
☐ Reconstructionist
☐ Renewal
☐ Humanistic
☐ Secular
☐ Just Jewish
☐ Prefer not to Say
☐ Figuring it Out
☐ I don't know
☐ Not affiliated
☐ Exploring
☐ Other
Other: ☐ ____________________

6. What does being Jewish mean to you?

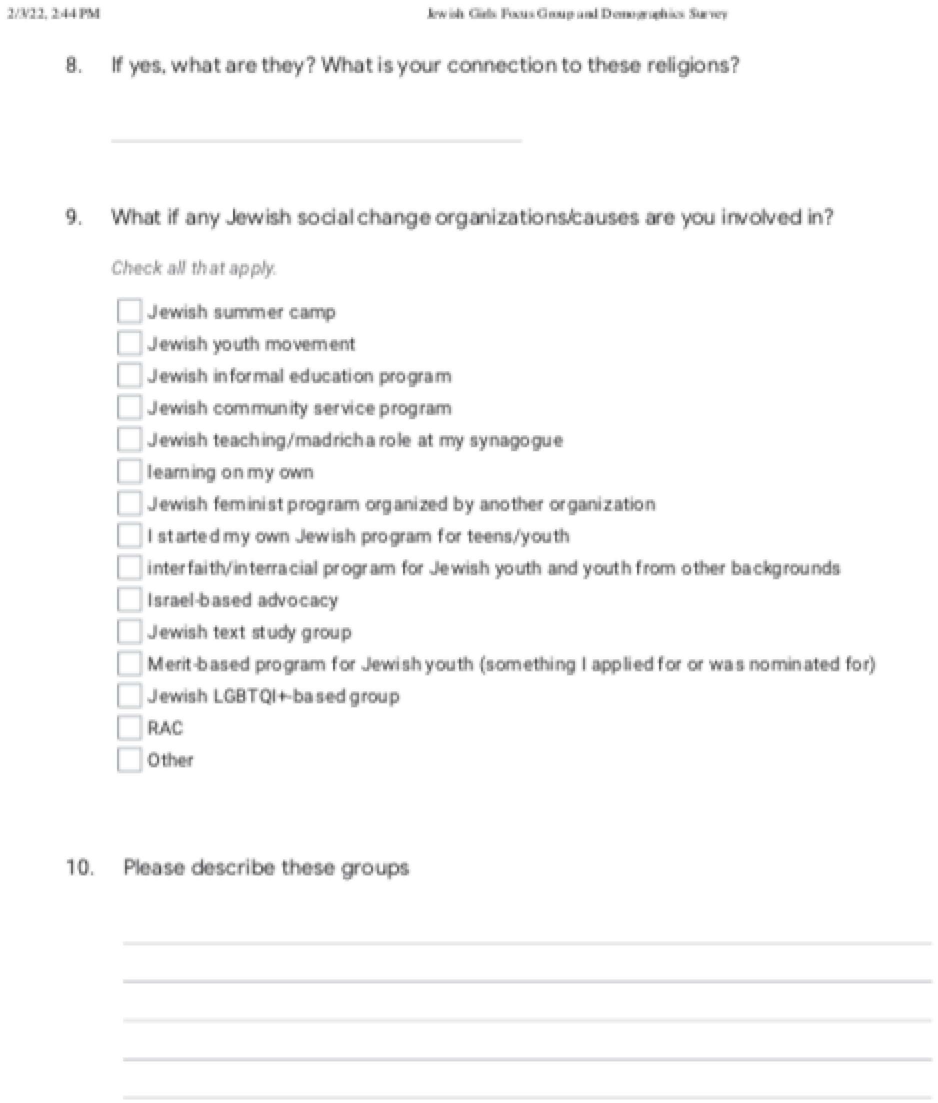
____
____
____
____
____

7. Do you participate in other religions?

Mark only one oval.

○ Yes
○ No

2/8



2/3/22, 2:44 PM Jewish Girls Focus Group and Demographics Survey

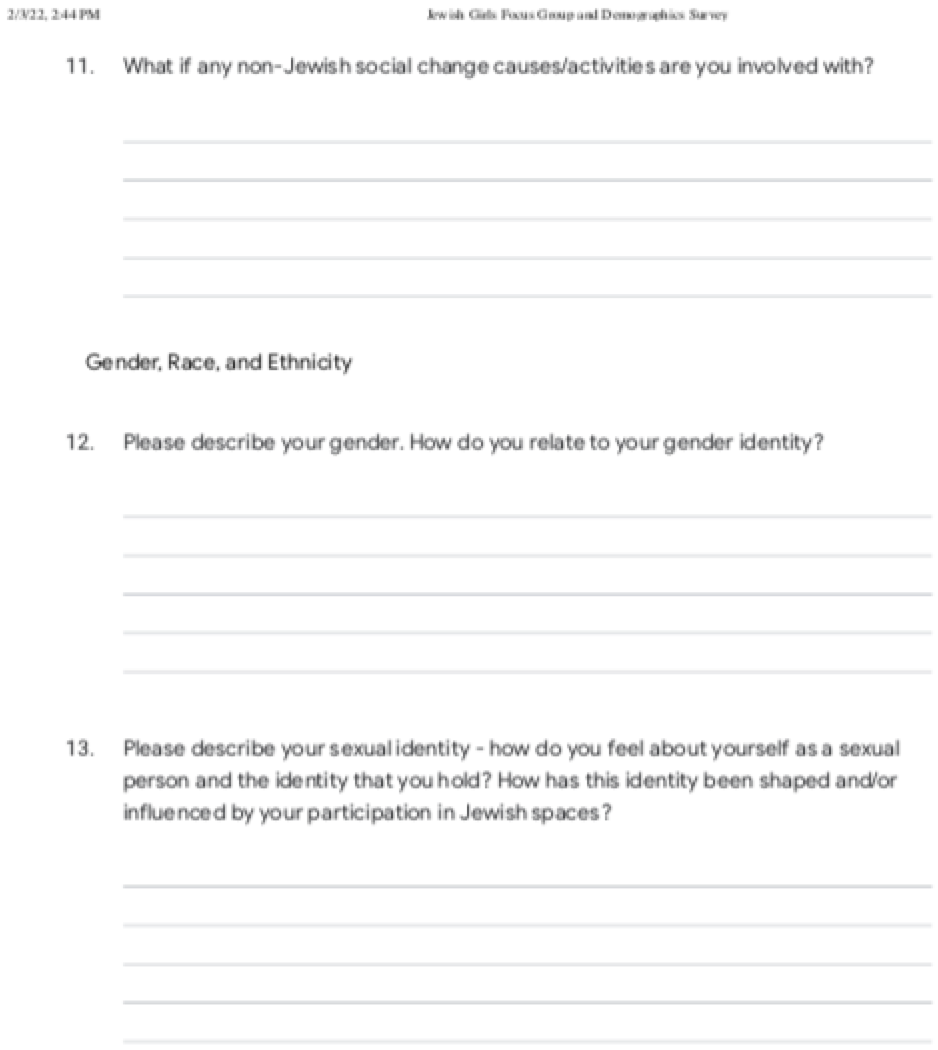
8. If yes, what are they? What is your connection to these religions?

9. What if any Jewish social change organizations/causes are you involved in?

Check all that apply.

☐ Jewish summer camp
☐ Jewish youth movement
☐ Jewish informal education program
☐ Jewish community service program
☐ Jewish teaching/madricha role at my synagogue
☐ learning on my own
☐ Jewish feminist program organized by another organization
☐ I started my own Jewish program for teens/youth
☐ interfaith/interracial program for Jewish youth and youth from other backgrounds
☐ Israel-based advocacy
☐ Jewish text study group
☐ Merit-based program for Jewish youth (something I applied for or was nominated for)
☐ Jewish LGBTQI+-based group
☐ RAC
☐ Other

10. Please describe these groups



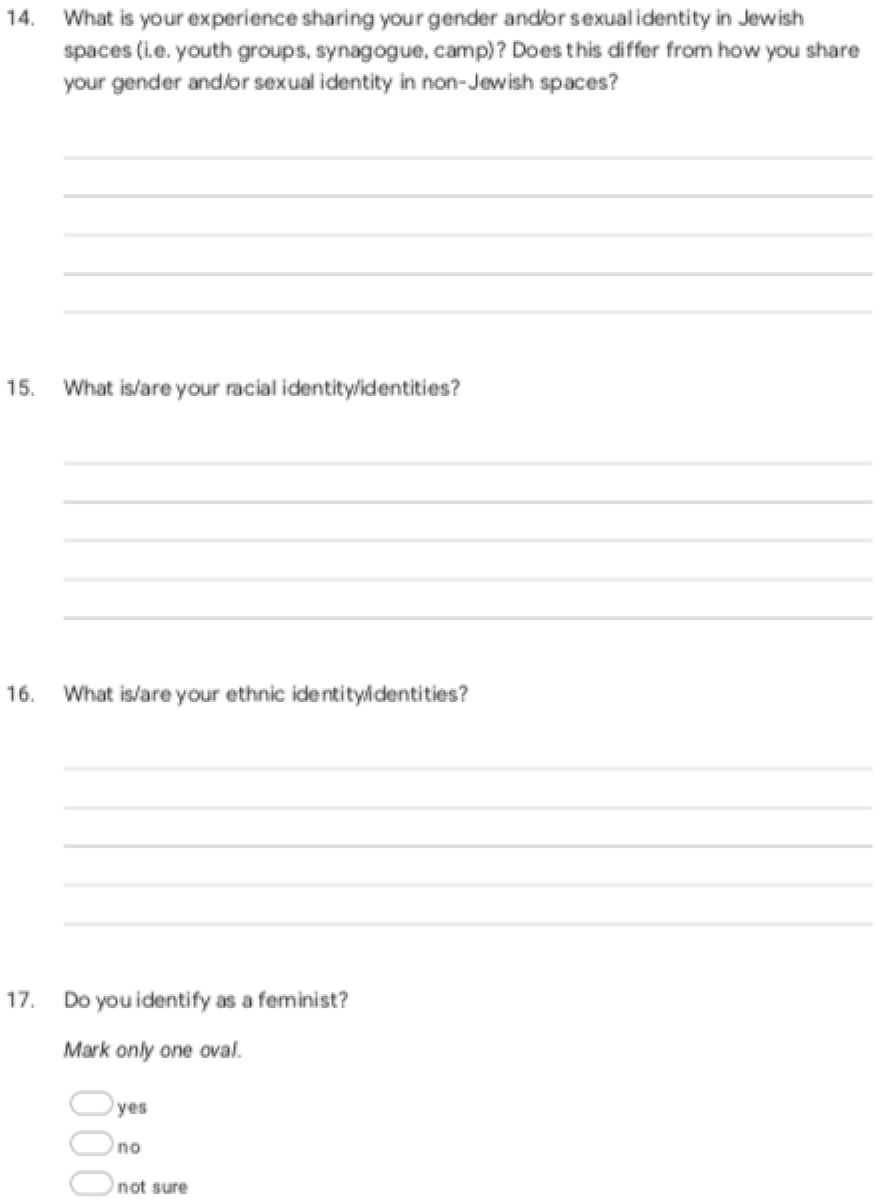
2/3/22, 2:44 PM Jewish Girls Focus Group and Demographics Survey

11. What if any non-Jewish social change causes/activities are you involved with?

Gender, Race, and Ethnicity

12. Please describe your gender. How do you relate to your gender identity?

13. Please describe your sexual identity - how do you feel about yourself as a sexual person and the identity that you hold? How has this identity been shaped and/or influenced by your participation in Jewish spaces?



14. What is your experience sharing your gender and/or sexual identity in Jewish spaces (i.e. youth groups, synagogue, camp)? Does this differ from how you share your gender and/or sexual identity in non-Jewish spaces?

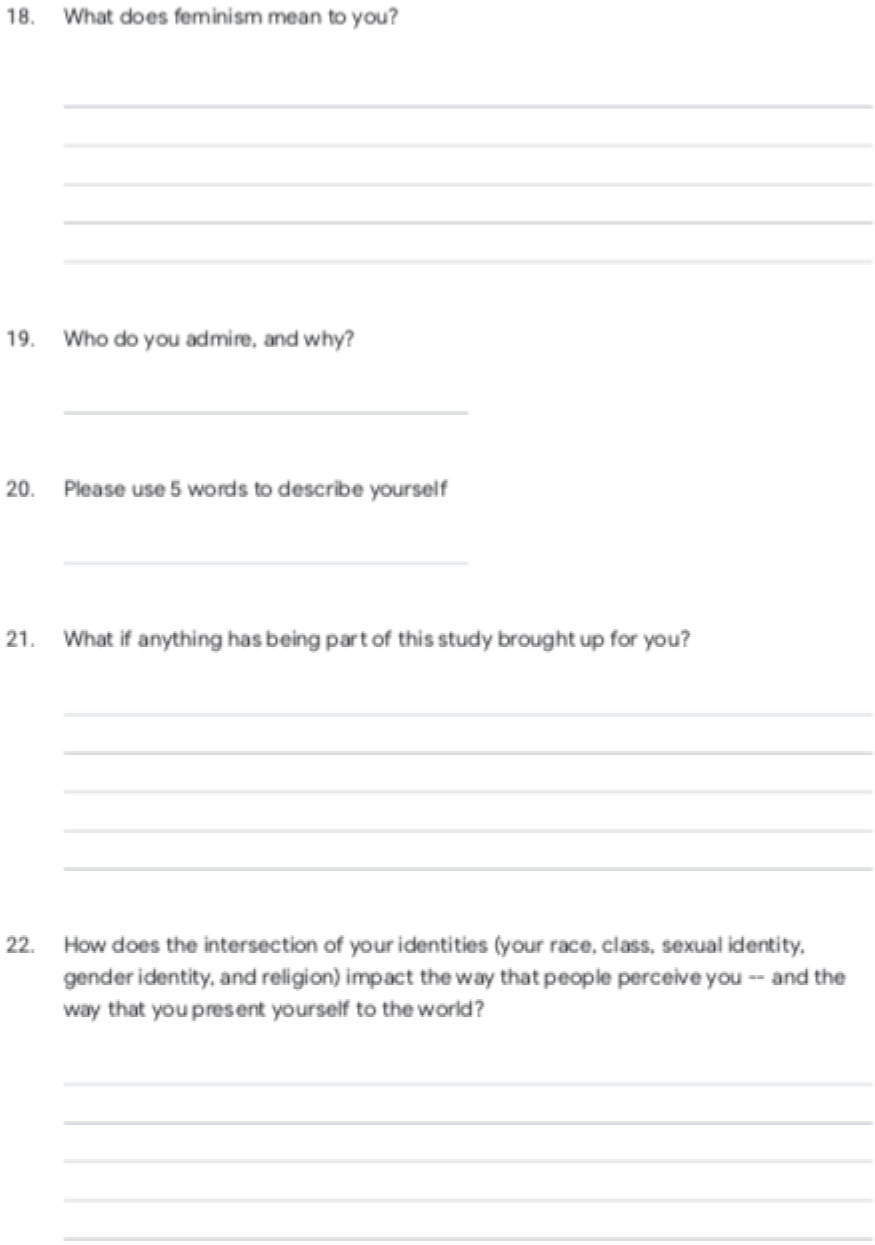
15. What is/are your racial identity/identities?

16. What is/are your ethnic identity/identities?

17. Do you identify as a feminist?

Mark only one oval.

○ yes
○ no
○ not sure



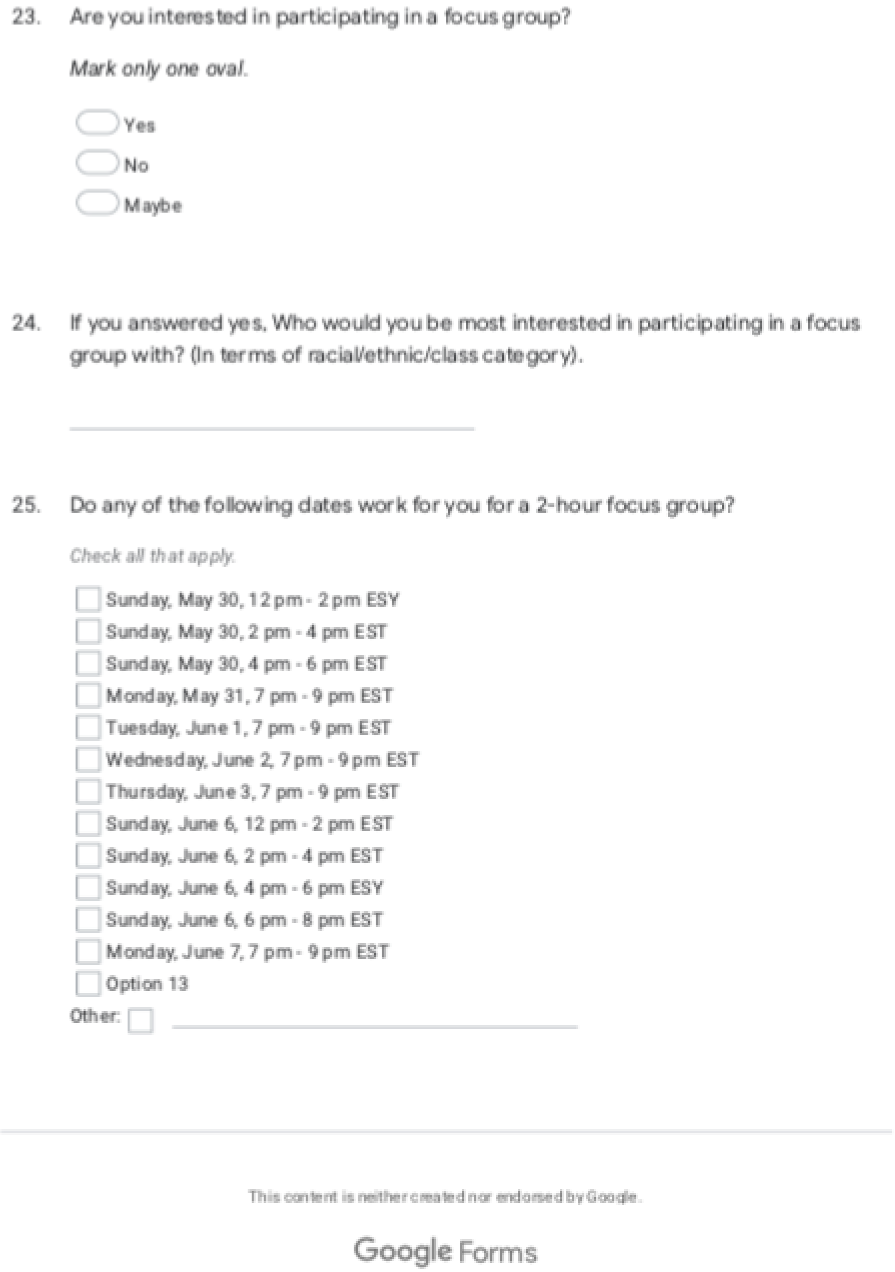
18. What does feminism mean to you?

19. Who do you admire, and why?

20. Please use 5 words to describe yourself

21. What if anything has being part of this study brought up for you?

22. How does the intersection of your identities (your race, class, sexual identity, gender identity, and religion) impact the way that people perceive you -- and the way that you present yourself to the world?



23. Are you interested in participating in a focus group?

Mark only one oval.

○ Yes
○ No
○ Maybe

24. If you answered yes, Who would you be most interested in participating in a focus group with? (In terms of racial/ethnic/class category).

25. Do any of the following dates work for you for a 2-hour focus group?

Check all that apply.

☐ Sunday, May 30, 12 pm - 2 pm ESY
☐ Sunday, May 30, 2 pm - 4 pm EST
☐ Sunday, May 30, 4 pm - 6 pm EST
☐ Monday, May 31, 7 pm - 9 pm EST
☐ Tuesday, June 1, 7 pm - 9 pm EST
☐ Wednesday, June 2, 7 pm - 9 pm EST
☐ Thursday, June 3, 7 pm - 9 pm EST
☐ Sunday, June 6, 12 pm - 2 pm EST
☐ Sunday, June 6, 2 pm - 4 pm EST
☐ Sunday, June 6, 4 pm - 6 pm ESY
☐ Sunday, June 6, 6 pm - 8 pm EST
☐ Monday, June 7, 7 pm - 9 pm EST
☐ Option 13
Other: ☐

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Google Forms

Appendix G

Focus Group Questions for White Jewish Girls

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today for a focus group interview. I will pose a question to the group and each person can take a turn to answer it. A focus group is meant to be an open and unstructured conversation, so I hope that you will speak openly and informally. Please listen carefully to one another and give each other a turn to speak. Given that we are on Zoom, I will mute everyone and use hand raising so that we can all hear one another. Please note that you are one half of the sample – since this is a study that focuses on Jewish girls' intersectional identities, Jewish girls of color are meeting in a separate group.

1. Please take a moment to introduce yourselves by sharing your name, your age, and where you live.
2. What is it like to be Jewish in your community?
3. What are the issues you care about?
4. What aspects of your identity drive your activism?
5. How does your activism impact your feelings about Judaism?
6. How have your feelings about your identity changed because of your activism?
7. Do you feel that you are seen or visible in the activist communities you participate in? Why or why not?
8. What role does your Jewishness play in activist spaces? How public are you with your Jewish identity in general? What influences your decision to share it or not share it?
9. To date, there is very little research on Jewish adolescent girls. The existing research shows that Jewish adolescent girls struggle from pressure to be "perfect;" to be thin, achieve good grades, and marry a nice Jewish boy. How do you relate to these findings?

How do they relate to your experience?

10. What do you want the Jewish community to know about Jewish girls?

Appendix H

Focus Group Questions for non-White Jewish Girls

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today for a focus group interview. I will pose a question to the group and each person can take a turn to answer it. A focus group is meant to be an unstructured conversation, so I hope that you will speak openly and informally. Please listen carefully to one another and give each other a turn to speak. Given that we are on Zoom, I will mute everyone and use hand raising so that we can all hear one another. Please note that you are one half of the sample – since this is a study that focuses on Jewish girls' intersectional identities, Jewish girls who are White are meeting in a separate group.

1. Please take a moment to introduce yourselves by stating your name, your age, where you live, and the kind of activist work you're involved in.
2. What is it like to be a Jew of color in your community?
3. What are the issues you care about?
4. What aspects of your identity drive your activism?
5. How does your activism impact your feelings about Judaism?
6. How have your feelings about your identity changed because of your activism?
7. Do you feel that you are seen or visible in the activist communities you participate in? Why or why not?
8. What role does your Jewishness play in activist spaces? How public are you with your Jewish identity in general? What influences your decision to share it or not share it?
9. To date, there is very little research on Jewish adolescent girls. The existing research shows that Jewish adolescent girls struggle from pressure to be "perfect;" to be thin, achieve good grades, and marry a nice Jewish boy. How do you relate to these findings?

How do they relate to your experience?

10. What do you want the Jewish community to know about Jewish girls?

Appendix I

Theme One: Activist Identity:

I am defining Activist Identity as the way that girls see themselves as activists and understand their relationship to activism. This also describes how they are shaped and informed by their work, and whether and how they see themselves contributing to social change. This is a term that I ascribed to the data since some of the girls were uncertain as to whether their work (speaking out against anti-Semitism, helping those in need, aligning themselves with Black Lives Matter, organizing social justice programs, providing academic support to underserved youth) fell within the parameters of "acceptable" activism. While my dissertation question emphasizes girls' activism, "How do Jewish activist girls who identify as activists navigate their intersectional identities?" I recognize that there are a lot of assumptions to the question - namely, that girls *will* identify as activists, and that they will know what it means to be an activist. When I first began my research, this did not seem like a complicated term to define. However, after speaking with girls, and thinking more about what it means to be an activist, I realize now, how complicated it can be, and really is due to issues such as, what counts as valid activism, who decides, where activism is performed, how it is performed, what causes matter, how often it is performed, who sees it, how it is recognized, and how the activist feels about her own work based on these – and other factors.

Moreover, when I chose the term 'activist' I didn't really know what I was talking about or really thinking about. I realize now that this is likely because Jewish adolescent girls haven't had much of a playing field when it comes to speaking up and/or advocating for causes they care about. Several times during the course of this research, I wondered at all whether the work they were doing counted as 'activist' at all. Does living in the world and surviving every day with a marginalized identity and/or multiple forms of marginalization and attempting to speak one's truth count as activism? I looked to the literature – the minimal literature on girls' activism. Keller (2015) notes that historically, girls' activism has been under-researched and under-politicized. Rather, attention is given to traditional 'male' practices that favor campaigning and lobbying. This leaves a vacuum in knowledge regarding what can be known about the ways girls engage in activism -- in terms of the things they care about, and how they are voicing concern about them. Moreover, going into this line of research, I also know that there is a dearth of research on Jewish activism, and Jewish women's activism in particular. So, it seems particularly important to co-construct a definition with girls of what it means to be a Jewish girl activist, particularly when working with such a diverse population of girls. After an interesting and informative conversation with Beth Cooper Benjamin, I was able to begin to see the forest through the trees, and maybe see that what the girls are doing is a subversive form of activism that needs to be looked at differently and needs further attention.

So, this very much relies on a co-constructed definition of activism. Had I relied on my own definition of Jewish girls' activism, this would have worked against the goals of the study. Rather, I wanted to hear from girls what they care about and how they are showing up to make a difference in the world. I also wanted to learn about the specific challenges they are facing. While I advertised the study as one for Jewish girl activists, it was implied that one should consider herself an activist to participate. However, I did not question participants about their activist identity when they expressed interest, nor do I think that this would have been a helpful exercise since I wanted to co-construct a definition of activist participation/identity with girls. However, I did not think it was my place to decide whether or not the girls were activists, nor did I specifically ask them if they identified as activists. During the intake process, some of the girls mentioned that they weren't sure if they were activists, and we talked about this during the interviews. I asked them what they cared about and what they were doing about it. From the literature I read to prepare for the study, it seems that 'activism' has become such a commodified issue in our society and perhaps the label itself isn't worth as much as doing and/or believing in something is. Brown and Taft talk about the culture of competition surrounding girls' activism - 'The Malala effect,' and I wanted to get away from that - where to be a bona fide activist one must stand up against a major threat and/or win a major award. The Jewish community has also bought into this with programs such as the Diller Award, and while it is wonderful to recognize and compensate Jewish teens for their social justice initiatives, I wanted to highlight and center the specific experiences of Jewish girls – whose voices might otherwise remain unknown.

The girls and I spoke about causes that they care about, and ways that they are participating in social justice/activist/'making a difference' causes. The words 'activist' and 'activism' certainly came up several times during the interviews. I just felt that if Jews have been excluded from so many activist spaces, and so many of these spaces have become contentious, it was more important to learn about the girls as an important starting point.

I was also concerned that if I went in with a specific definition of activism, I would lose girls who didn't think of themselves as activists. While I could have provided a check-list of typical things an activist might do, say, or care about, I feel that this would have limited the diversity of my sample size, and even precluded girls from participating. As I worked with girls, heard from them, learned with them, and heard their stories, I also thought that maybe claiming their voices, speaking their truths, speaking truth to power, asserting their identity, challenging dominant structures in the face of insurmountable barriers is what makes them activists. Being in the world everyday - fighting the fight - and creating space to center them and their experiences should certainly count. Who decides who is an activist? They are coming into themselves. I realized that it mattered less about what they were doing, but rather, where they stood in relationship to what they were doing. Moreover, I think that it is particularly important to leave space to co-construct a definition of activism with Jewish girls, given that the activism that they participate may not be given the same visibility is other forms of activism if it relates to anti-Semitism and/or Israel given the overall lack of discourse around these issues.

As someone who is committed to working from a girl-centered approach, I also don't think that it's up to me to decide whether or not someone is an activist. While I've recently learned about "virtue signaling" and performance culture, I am not interested in judging someone's intentions or the integrity of their activism. I think that this is particularly important when thinking about Jewish adolescent girls, who are putting themselves out into the world in all types of ways. So, for all of those reasons, I wanted to keep the eligibility criteria open. A few things that went into my mind as I thought about developing this code were: Where do girls see themselves in relationship to activism? What drives girls to activism? What makes them care? And, How do they feel about accepting this label [activist] for themselves? I think back to Taft (2013) who found that girls in her study - who hailed from the West coast and Central America), maintained a tentative relationship to this label. She surmised that gender insecurities prevented them from seeing themselves as full activists. Taken together, it seems particularly important to examine how this work shapes girls. Several nodes and subcodes are included in this definition.

I also want to see where girls locate themselves within activist movements and causes and whether they consider themselves activists, and if necessary, why they feel tentative about accepting this label. As a feminist researcher who is also seeking to discover new knowledge, I think that it is also important to question who has the power to decide what counts as activism and what doesn’t? For that reason, I wanted to leave the concept open-ended. I also wanted to understand the tensions girls face as they find their place within activist environments, how they exercise voice and agency, how they navigate difficult decisions, and the different environments in which they enact their activism. I also wanted to understand the impact on their identity. In particular, I wanted to understand where girls are showing up as activists, where they feel activated, and where they see themselves in relation to the status quo. Are they engaging in the activism they want? Do they want to be doing less, or more? What are the factors that are holding them back or propelling them forward? What are the barriers that stand in their way? How do they feel about their own sense of self in relation to the work that they are doing? What is the impact on their relationships with other people - their friends, their family, the communities with which they engage? How does girls’ Jewishness impact their activist identity? Do they consider themselves Jewish activists? How are they changed by their activism? How does their activism change them? How do they feel that their Jewishness is seen or unseen by others in relation to their activism? Where are they learning about activism? What do they feel good about?

What is activism? Another issue that made it difficult to locate girls’ activism was the way that they talked about their change work. Many girls noted that they were participating in programs, school-based initiatives, fellowship programs and volunteer activities, all of which served a social justice mission. For example, Chloe was participating in a program where was learning how advocate against anti-Semitism, while Laila was part of a racial justice group at her school. Several girls indicated that they were involved in social action and/or social justice activities through youth groups, volunteer programs -- some Jewish, others not Jewish -- and school activities. They were organizing programs and clubs that addressed issues like climate change, BLM, gender equality, human rights issues, homelessness, and Jewish issues, such as anti-Semitism, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I learned that girls were instituting change in different places: some were creating change in their schools through curriculum reform, or by speaking up against issues when they occurred in the moment. For example, Chloe shared an example where she challenged a peer on his anti-Semitic behavior. Others were starting initiatives on their own - Jordana launched a project to collect and distribute menstrual products to girls in the Global south - or working with friends and peers to institute change in their schools, their communities, and beyond. Some were working with intergenerational groups, such as Ariella, who is working with Jewish youth and adults on a variety of issues, including voter registration and racial justice causes.

The change they were involved with operated on both local, national, and international scales. Some girls were instituting change through organized programs, Jewish and non-Jewish, where they were being mentored, or where they were mentoring others. Some girls received attention for their activist initiatives. Jordana - who started a women's health resource - received a grant for a program for her program. She was then invited to join an international board. Others implemented their activist ideas and programs into educational programs for peers for youth groups. It was common for girls to advocate for multiple activist causes. Laila speaks about a cultural appropriation issue that happened at her school, which resulted in a change in her school's policy. Others started clubs based on issues they experienced. For example, Daniella, Mia and Chloe all started initiatives to create Jewish visibility in their schools. Daniella started a JSU after switching from a Jewish school to a public high school, where she experienced anti-Semitism.

While their experiences were diverse, the questions that formed the sub-concepts included, how did they feel about what they were doing? How did they get there? What was their journey like? Who did they encounter? Who helped them get there? How did they feel about what they were doing? It should be noted that for the most part, I decided to keep Israeli-Jewish activism separate since I feel that this speaks more closely to Jewish identity and meaning making.

Activist Passions and Causes: This describes the issues and causes that girls are responding to through their activism. It interrogates what they care about and why they care about it, their relationship to the issue/s, how they got involved, the extent to which they are involved, what their involvement looks like, and how they describe their involvement. I lifted the term "passionate" from the girls - however, I also asked girls what they are passionate about, so this could be attributed to my own wording. For example, during the focus group for girls who identified as Black and/or biracial, all three girls used the word "passion" to describe the feelings they attached to their activist causes. This suggests that they were emotionally invested in their cause and that they attached a feeling or emotion to it. Olivia noted, "I'm just really *passionate* [italics added] about like all the racial injustice for like every minority, but especially the Black community and then also the environment and then just women's rights and LGBTQ rights." Maayan similarly noted, "I'm... I am passionate about the climate crisis, um. See, I just did a protest for that so that's on my mind and that's pretty much what I'm working on right now, it's the climate crisis. Laila also shared, "I'm really passionate about Black Lives Matter, women's rights and like what's happening at the Mexican border and LGBTQ." Samantha, who is White, also shared, "I am very, very *passionate* about a lot of things, but as of right now, some of my biggest *passions* are women's empowerment, along with body positivity and my body my choice movements, along with sexual harassment and rape victims, I mean rapists going to jail for their crimes and not the woman getting blamed. Um, and then I'm also a big advocate for mental health…. Um, people who are struggling with mental health and breaking the stigma around mental health. I'm also a huge activist for children with disabilities, trying to break the stigma trying to get rid of people saying the "R" word... trying to understand and educate people around me about that." Similarly, Daniella who is White, also stated that "I definitely would say that, like I'm an ally for other groups, and like I support all sorts of causes like BLM and like I definitely would consider myself a feminist to maybe not as much to the point where I am as active as I am for like the Jewish community just because I'm really *passionate* about my Jewish identity." Emma, who is Colombian, similarly shared, "I'm really *passionate* about like immigration and stuff like that. I like, focus a lot on that stuff at school and just like learning about that stuff."

Girls spoke about causes that were personal to them. Taylor, for example, shared that she cares about "Black lives Matter, Stop Asian Hate... I think that's a very important one, especially currently with COVID-19. Um, the LGBT community and all the problems that they face. Um.... feminism. That's not like a movement, but um. Climate change, mental health awareness, stuff like that. I try and do the smaller things. Like, I try and bring up my mental health in the most casual way possible to my friends and stuff and I just try and make it more part of my routine and that way I make it less stigmatized by just casually talking about it." Phoebe, who is gender queer also explained, "I think the spaces that I've been most involved in are like feminist and I guess like LGBTQ+ spaces and things of that sort." Mia shared, "I've been really passionate about environmental activism for a really long time. My mom's vegan, my sister's vegan. I'm pescatarian in that I do my best to eat…. Like you know, like I cut out meat. Like I've been a part of this organization for like two years now that I really love.”

Tova, who is modern Orthodox and who attends a Jewish high school, is trying to start a LGBTQ club at her modern Orthodox high school. She thinks “all people should be included and feel safe and should be treated kindly.” Rachel, for example, notes, “So when I started doing activism work, I started with mental health stuff, it was at least for me it was one of the easier ways to get into activism just because there are so many opportunities to do so. Um, I’ve struggled with anxiety and depression in the past um it's one of those things that it's biological right... like all the intergenerational trauma like, if you look at my family and, like everyone has something. Yeah great um so but I'm very fortunate, you know I got a lot of hope I’m in a really great position and because of that, I felt it was necessary to give back. A lot of my work is very much right in its intersectional so if I'm dealing with mental health but I'm also looking at mental health with women or looking at mental health.”

Daniella notes, “I definitely would say that, like I'm an ally for other groups. And like I support all sorts of causes like BLM, and like I definitely would consider myself a feminist to maybe not as much to the point where I am as active as I am for like the Jewish community, just because I’m really passionate about my Jewish identity, and I think that's just something that is like kind of my... it's a huge part of my identity, and so I feel like that, since I have all... I just have a lot to say about it, so I can, and I’m just educated on it, so it’s like kind of my thing, I guess, but I definitely would say I support all other kinds of marginalized communities but the Jewish community is just the one that I personally feel like I can speak for.”

Jordana notes that “I kind of had a taste of Judaism and activism that mingled together and I knew that I eventually want to do something in relation to women's rights so about a year and a half ago. My mom and I were watching the Oscars one night and this documentary called Period End of Sentence won best short documentary. They won the Oscar. I had... I was actually on my period when the film had like, happened and I was like dying of pain, or something or other, and my mom was like “Hey, like look it's literally a documentary about periods and it just won an Oscar,” and I was like I was shocked I’d never seen anything like that. Um, I discovered... so that's how I discovered mental equity is through that film. And I learned that like girls and other countries also have to skip school because of their periods, but the difference is that I had access to healthcare and medical products, and you know birth control, and all these other things, and they don't, so I was really like empowered to start opening up about my story, and my experience to make a difference in the menstrual equity field and so through that film I discovered [organization], which is a global human rights organization, where I opened up a club at my school. I am a student advisory board theater for them. I interned with them where I actually got to develop like their menstrual equity curriculum, which is really awesome.”

Experiences in Activist Spaces: This describes the experiences girls have had as they go about “performing” or engaging in activism in their schools, their communities, and beyond. This is the *doing*. It explains how girls are engaging in activism and the ways in which they are conveying their messages and perspectives. It also describes who they are doing it with, how they are getting their work done, and what their activism looks like. It tells the story of girls’ activism and describes the experiences they’ve had, where they are participating in activism, and where they aren’t, and why. What is working and what isn’t? What opportunities might there be? Who are they learning from? Who are they inspired by? The term “activist spaces” came from the girls themselves. This is important to consider as the concept of space suggests that space is amorphous. In addition to participating in meetings, protests, and organizing, girls are now conducting a significant amount of their activism online.

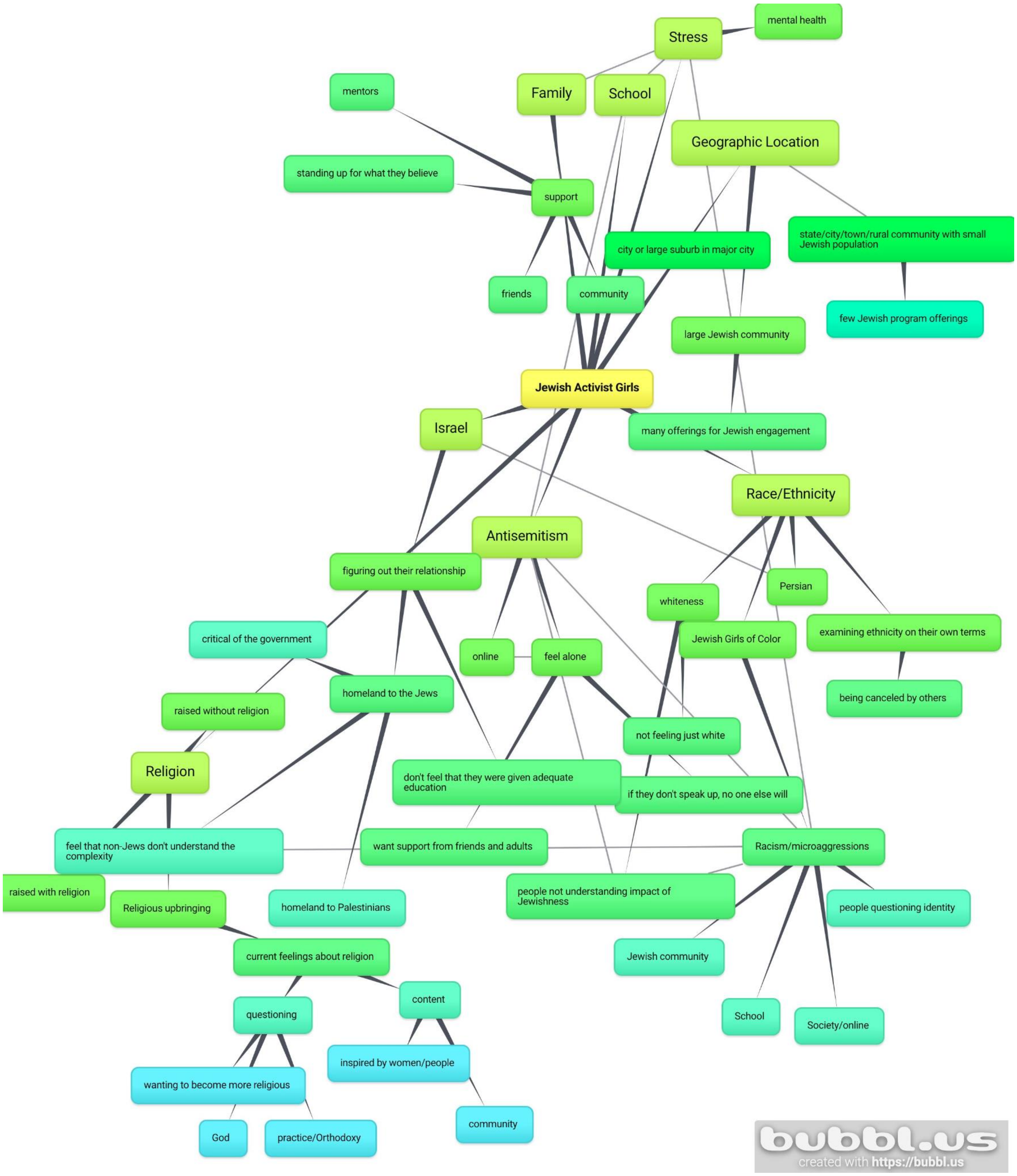
I originally had a separate code, school-based activism. I created this code because girls spoke frequently about school-based activism. They spoke about how they were exercising activism in their schools through curriculum reform, protests, and other means – this made sense, since they spend the majority of their time in school. They also spoke about their involvement with school-based activist organizations and clubs. I initially planned to keep this code separate since school plays such an important role in so many of their lives. However, I soon realized that the boundaries between school and the rest of their lives couldn't be so easily drawn – particularly with the prevalence of social media, and the fact that for many girls, school occurred online when the study was conducted due to COVID-19. Things became further complicated when it came to examining the relationship with Jewish activism since some of the girls attended Jewish schools and/or were placed in positions where they needed to assert their Jewish identity in school. For those reasons, it made sense to integrate this category into the larger concept of *Experiences in Activist Spaces.*

Emma provides an excellent case in point for the reason why I merged these codes. When I asked her, "What does your activism look like?" She responded, "I mean, it's really like it kind of ranges because I remember at our confirmation (a ceremony that non-Orthodox synagogues use to mark a 10th grader's completion of participation in formal Jewish learning) a couple years ago. I wrote my like, little speech about like, finding my identity and like, becoming comfortable with identity as Jewish and also Hispanic. It comes from like, smaller things like that. And also, just like being like a friend to other people of color. But then it also goes to like fundraising for these organizations within school and like just doing community service. But I think like, something I've had to realize is that, like I don't have to be like, making like, world changes to be doing good because I used to think that all the time that like, if I wasn't like making these huge changes, like saving the world like it didn't mean anything. But I've, kind of like, gone on to realize over time that like, even just like, speaking out, like making small speeches, like that can make a difference." Emma's statement provides an example of how her Jewish and Hispanic identities inform her feelings about her activism and her ways of exercising it.

Girls also explained where they *weren't* participating in activist work - and the barriers that can preclude them from participating in it - as well as some of the successes they experience. For this reason, I came up with the two sub-codes: (Accomplishments and Challenges) to explain the accomplishments and challenges girls can experience when they engage in activist work. These concepts are not meant to position girls' activism in a binary way, as in successful or unsuccessful, but rather, to illustrate – in girls' words – some of the actual experiences they have as activists. Moreover, the successes and/or challenges they experience do not happen in isolation – a success can follow a challenge, or vice versa. For example, Laila shares, "I am part of a group for students of color to be part of a safe space at school. So we did things like this fall, we tried to get the Black Lives Matter flag raised at my school, but the school board unfortunately shot back down. Um... we did get a cultural appropriation rule put in place at my school." These concepts seemed important given the dearth of literature regarding the messiness - and joy – that can come with Jewish girls' activist work.

Activist Accomplishments: This describes what girls have achieved - on their own - or with others. Girls have launched initiatives, received awards, organized events, and brought coalitions together. They have experienced success in their activist work. That is not to say that they feel…

Appendix J


mental health
Stress
mentors
Family
School
Geographic Location
standing up for what they believe
support
city or large suburb in major city
state/city/town/rural community with small Jewish population
friends
community
few Jewish program offerings
large Jewish community
Jewish Activist Girls
Israel
many offerings for Jewish engagement
Race/Ethnicity
Antisemitism
figuring out their relationship
Persian
whiteness
Jewish Girls of Color
examining ethnicity on their own terms
critical of the government
online
feel alone
being canceled by others
homeland to the Jews
raised without religion
not feeling just white
Religion
don't feel that they were given adequate education
if they don't speak up, no one else will
feel that non-Jews don't understand the complexity
want support from friends and adults
Racism/microaggressions
raised with religion
Religious upbringing
homeland to Palestinians
people not understanding impact of Jewishness
people questioning identity
current feelings about religion
Jewish community
content
questioning
School
Society/online
inspired by women/people
wanting to become more religious
community
God
practice/Orthodoxy
bubbl.us
created with https://bubbl.us